

A report on women and Information and
Communication Technologies (ICTs)

for PAT 15

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seminar participants identified that enabling women's access to ICTs need to be understood to be a citizenship initiative, designed to connect excluded groups of women to the democratic process, to public services and to the developing information society. Taking up these ideas and consulting women in the design of this and the action required to implement them meet government's commitment under the Global Platform for Action, on which government will be presenting a 5 year progress reporting June 2000.

Participants identified the following for enabling women's access to ICTs in poor neighbourhoods:

- key barriers
- key opportunities
- key requirements

The key barriers women experience are:

- poverty - can't afford it ; much to do as a carer
- safety - can't go out at night
- cultural - can't go out at all; need all women environments
- image of ICTs - macho, irrelevant to women's lives and concerns
- lack of basic skills and confidence necessary to access learning
- citizenship - lack of access and dissociation from democratic processes

These barriers cannot be overcome through ICTs alone. they require joined up government to take up key opportunities for policy intervention throughout the policy agenda.

Some key opportunities - joined up government

- poverty: address employment issues, childcare, and design welfare and training benefits to meet women's needs
- community involvement - removing barriers to women's ITC access offers potential to connect low income women to the democratic process; improve their access to services and resources, and strengthen their roles as community networkers
- excluded communities - women orientated training and access provides opportunities for women in excluded communities

Key requirements

Recommendations are made for infrastructural support for women's ICT access:

- resourcing women's services and structures;
- shaping mainstream provision
- integrated services and joined up approaches
- continuity in consultation
- funding

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Mainstreaming: a joined up approach to ICT policy and practice

Projects and services may not consciously set out to exclude women because after all they are 50% of the population or more. They are expected to take up services and opportunities. But the evidence shows that at the very least indirect discrimination occurs and they often don't benefit. Policies, surveys and reports will sometimes speak of "gender", but when the recommendations are written and the money allocated, women and the particular responses they require too frequently disappear.

- Seminar participants felt strongly that this exclusion of women should be addressed within social exclusion interventions, using good practice in setting gender equalities targets, monitoring and evaluation

Most of the recommendations below impact on a range of policies and practice, including childcare, welfare reform, access and curriculum of education and training, housing, transport, leisure and urban regeneration. They provide material for mainstreaming the substance of this report into ICT policy, and demonstrate that access to ICTs for women cannot be tackled in isolation from policy intervention in other areas.

- Joined up thinking is needed to integrate ICT initiatives into a wide range of government policies, existing or future.

Any projects or initiatives relating to women and ICT must be underpinned by a developed understanding of women's wider needs and by appropriate support to enable women's access and take up.

- A significant part needs to be played by the government Women's Unit in partnership with the Social Exclusion Unit, local and national partners including government policy and equalities officers, urban regeneration and ICT officers, women's voluntary and community sector. Partners should be involved in planning, monitoring and evaluation locally and nationally, including but not exclusively through Women's National Commission

2. An infrastructure to support women's use and involvement in ICTs

a) Resource Women's services and structures

Existing women's centres and projects are precarious and under resourced due to short term limited funding. Capacity needs to be built to respond to growing demand for access to internet and for ICT training by service users, staff and volunteers

- Long term sustainable funding to women's projects and organisations to produce results:
 - Local, free, flexible access
 - Funding for follow on as well as introductory training
 - Permanent core funding for more women focussed work (e.g. women's centres, women's projects within larger organisations) to enable women to gain skills and access to ICTs, in a context which addresses and recognises their wider needs and issues, and gives women to access mainstream provision (of training etc).
 - Support and build the capacity of women's groups to handle large projects;
 - Centres, projects, grass roots organisations and programmes targeting specific groups of women, for example, black and minority ethnic women, older and younger women, refugees, lesbians, women with disabilities, all of whom are vulnerable to particular forms of social exclusion and poverty.
 - Funding for girls/young women's work to engage them in ICT and encourage more into Higher Education
 - Provide more funding opportunities
 - Fund existing work
 - Fund security (against theft) as well as equipment
- Resource networking between women's projects; encourage **links and publicity/promotional** work to build on good practice and innovation (from within and outside women's services)
- Provide funding and practical support for women in communications and women in ICT training **networks** nationally and internationally to strengthen their impact and in put:
 - More trainer training to enable more women to become champions, shapers and technicians as well as users of the internet
 - Form and fund a network of women communicators who want to promote women centred training, access, usage and design of ICT technology
 - Fund a network of women, **one in each area/region to co-ordinate access points for women in the area** – they need to be independent and national network – needs to be an access point for women in each neighbourhood by 2008 to ensure equal access to services
- promote positive images of women as technicians, and shapers of the internet within media and promotional material for community access and training in ICTs

- Establish a trust fund to support and promote women's ICTs initiatives:
 - run by women trustees, for women's organisations and initiatives
 - women only training provision and capacity building
 - standard setting in holistic women centred learning
 - advocacy and lobbying
- Develop non-competitive bidding for funds for women's ICT projects– **find out who is already doing work and start with existing network of women's centres/projects**
- Organise a donor forum for women's ICT initiatives to avoid duplication and to co-ordinate funding investment
- Move away from funding strategies which prioritise exclusive focus on jobs and employment and qualifications outputs to more holistic approaches to training

b) Mainstreaming provision: the right ways to learn, the right places to learn, the right people to learn with

- Enable a nation wide network of safe, supportive spaces (including but not exclusively women only) to enable access and training for women and ICTs
- Invest in good quality sustainable childcare: multi-cultural, culturally sensitive; well resources; permanent; local; catering for the full age range from babies to 14 year olds
- Fund support and development for women's take up of ICTs with a wide range of expectations and outcomes, incorporating a high priority for a focus on life skills and personal development, looking beyond crude outputs for employment opportunities and exclusive focus on vocational training
- Make provision to assess every individual woman as they have complex needs. This is particularly true of women experiencing poverty or social exclusion or living in an area needing renewal. In relation to training they should be assessed in relation to costs to train, caring responsibilities and transport needs
- Develop a system of accreditation for women centred ICT trainers
- Create a register of trainers able to provide women centred training
- Identify and earmark resources for trainer training for women already working in (women's) projects
- Create and promote mandatory equalities guidelines to eliminate material offensive to women such as pornography and racist sites from public and government sponsored internet access points
- Use women centred trainers and developers also in the following proposed provisions
 - after school family learning

- travelling workshops
- mobile libraries with access to IT

c) Holistic policies designed for the lives of women

- Provide adequate resources to enable women to take up opportunities to access ICT training, and development projects, i.e.
 - financial support,
 - childcare,
 - transport
 - ESL language support
 - literacy and basic skills,
 - support which recognises the diversity of women's experience, interests and priorities
- 'Family' learning in after school and holiday programmes for children, encouraging women with caring responsibilities for children to learn with them and participate in teaching

3. Integrated services and joined up approaches

- Audit ICT equipment in schools and enable more community use
- Integrate ICT connection and access into new housing provision and include in public housing policy
- Integrated ICTs should be in all new initiatives (health, education etc).
- In particular community centres should be funded to offer public access to support private use.
- Integrate ICTs into existing public and private services (e.g. pubs, schools, village halls, health centres and in new use of redundant sites)
- Integrate women's ICT needs into other policies such as lifelong learning, sure start, and the national childcare strategy
- Schools programmes which encourage girls learning in ICTs and which tackle gender bias in teaching and access to equipment
- Disaggregate figures/statistics to show women's take up of ICTs, education and employment in the ICT field

4. Keep up the consultation on women's needs in this area

- Involve women, women's organisations and ICT projects, and others concerned with women's needs and experiences in the policy development and implementation process on a long term and permanent basis
- Include women as a key focus in the policy agenda systematically and in more depth (mainstream)
- Provide feedback at agreed intervals on progress and outcomes to participants in consultation and information gathering.
- Submit this paper as a contribution to the consultation process for government reporting to Beijing + 5 in June 2000 to the UN CSW, on implementation of the Global Platform for Action, adopted in September 1995., which include a substantial section on women, media and ICTs

5. Funding

- Seek cross party commitment to enable commitment to longer term resourcing essential for sustainability
- Allocate funding at national level targeted at women:
 - determined and managed at local level
 - with regional and local co-ordination by individual women targeting women
 - provide technical and advisory support to unlock existing resources including some nationally funded schemes (UFI - university for industry; universities and colleges)
- See 'Women's Services' above for additional recommendations

INTRODUCTION

Context and Approach

PAT 15 is gathering information and making recommendations on best practice in providing access to IT, and IT skills for people in poor neighbourhoods. Women Connect was commissioned to contribute to the information gathering by organising a seminar and reporting on women's needs and appropriate provision.

This report is an input to the *information-gathering* phase of PAT 15's work. It is based a seminar organised by Women Connect in July 1999 and draws on the wide range of experience of women as providers of services to women, policy makers, and providers of technical support and training in the ICT field. Participants included members of PAT 15; women's organisations who are providing a range of social and welfare services to women, many of whom live in poor neighbourhoods; women in organisations providing technical training and support services in the ICT field; and women involved in the policy process as representatives of women's organisations, and as government advisors. civil servants who are providing tech disadvantaged communities. Many of those present had extensive experience of taking forward women's equality within the policy process and had specific knowledge of how barriers to women's social inclusion and women's poverty can be linked to double discrimination due to class, age, race, disability and sexuality.

The findings of this report should be placed in the *context* of informed research. This research identifies the barriers that women face in accessing appropriate and equal access to resources, power and citizenship and disseminates good practice how to meet the needs of women who experience poverty. *References: See for example Itzin, C, Gender ,Culture, Power and Change in Gender, Culture and Organisational change, Itzin and Newman eds, Routledge 1995; Women Lister, R., (1992) Women's Economic Dependence and Social Security, Manchester, EOC; Glendenning, C. and Miller, J. eds (1987) Women and Poverty in Britain, Wheatsheaf, Brighton; Waring, M. (1989) If women counted, m a new feminist economics, Macmillan, London; recent research on low pay and on pensions commissioned by the Fawcett Society- , and Social Focus on women and Men, Office for National Statistics, Stationary Office*

It is not within our scope to review this research or good practice or how it could be applied inside the urban areas identified by government as in need of renewal, better policies and joined up delivery. This review needs to take place within the context of joined up government, using the resources of the Women's Unit and their links with women's organisations and researchers..

Organisations researching the use of ICTs in local communities emphasis that *ICTs cannot be seen as a 'quick technological fix'* for women's poverty and disadvantage. Women's disadvantage in the complex arena of ICTs is reflected in access, take up, design, employment, content, visibility and so on. These points were by seminar participants and are reinforced by the experience of Women Connect. This is another area of research where material already exists that could be drawn upon to shape the policy agenda, and where further research would be useful.

Participants also reflected on the potential of ICTs to enable women to overcome barriers to social inclusion and identified imaginative practical solutions to facilitate women's

access and usage of ICTs. These are based on holistic approaches to use of ICTs, designed to enable women to use and adapt for specific purposes and adapted to the complex realities of women's lives and women's multiple roles as heads of families, community leaders and educators. This would be a radical departure from the narrower employment led approach of much existing provision. It implies a need for radical reappraisal of training and development strategies, and allocation of resources to provide appropriate environments for learning and access points for usage.

Seminar participants also stressed the *heterogeneity* of women as a group - this fact calls for policy and practice that take account of diversity and difference in need and access to resources. There is considerable material available that identifies the implications of these differences for policy addressing poverty and the findings need to be incorporated more meaningfully into policy and implementation.

The seminar established that women have already produced much quality analysis and many practical proposals relevant to addressing women's needs in ICTs. These come from grass roots organisations, consultations and policy initiatives led by local and national government, research-based sources and individual women. What is less clear is how government and others have in practice acted upon women's proposals and voices over many years to ensure implementation and positive change. At the seminar some women who had been contributing to policy in this area for many years expressed a degree of frustration at being asked again - at the same time, participants grasped the policy opportunity with enthusiasm as a first opportunity to influence allocation of significant resources under the current government! However, it was strongly felt that a more *ongoing*, permanent and structured form of policy development involving women at all levels is needed. This could do more justice to tackling the complex factors underlying women's poverty, their experience as leaders and sustainers of initiatives designed to tackle deprivation in communities and neighbourhoods, and their approach to use of ICTs as shapers and technicians as well as consumers. *It is also because of the relative invisibility of women in all these policy debates.*

PAT15 is attempting a mainstreaming activity in focussing on the particular issues for women. In other words it is incorporating attention to the impacts on women into its policy development process. Mainstreaming as a mechanism is a key theme within European equalities legislation and practice and derives from the UN World Conferences on Women (especially the last held in Beijing in 1995) and the resulting document, the Global Platform for Action (GPFA) to which the UK is a signatory. This is relevant in at least two ways - one for its analysis of and recommendations for measures to counter women's poverty; the other for its recommendations for measures governments need to take to address to enable women's access to media (we include ICTs within this). Appropriate recommendations from PAT 15 could contribute to the progress report by government on implementation of its commitments under the GPFA. This report is being co-ordinated by the Women's Unit for Beijing + 5, a special meeting to the UN CSW at New York, June 2000.

PAT 15's primary focus is access to services. This perspective has been broadened through the seminar and in this report. The seminar has established that a better understanding of women and ICTs can contribute to all the challenges set by Bringing Britain Together - a national strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

These points inform the recommendations from this seminar and report.

The seminar and Women Connect

Women Connect has created a network of women's voluntary and community organisations working throughout England. It is funded by National Lottery Charities Board and based with the Community Development Foundation. The twenty member organisations are integrating the use of ICTs within their organisations, creating local and community of interest networks and working towards enabling their users to access and use ICTs. The users of these organisations include women who live in poor neighbourhoods, who are poor, who are socially excluded for a whole variety of reasons. The members include organisations working with older women, lesbians, black and minority ethnic women, disabled women, and refugees. See www.womenconnect.org.uk

The event brought together women from most of these 20 organisations and Women Connect's joint project co-ordinators, together with two lead members of PAT 15 (men) and a small group of women who have expertise in ICTs, women's training, ICT enterprise and rural women, regeneration as well as the range of specific issues central to the communities they serve: barriers and how to access resources to overcome them relating to childcare, single parenthood, discrimination in access to employment and training, health and housing, violence against women. Also participating were the Women's National Commission and the Cabinet Office Women's Unit.

Information about participants is in Appendix A

Further information about the seminar can be obtained from Women Connect.

Women's Poverty

World-wide women are the majority of the poor. This is reflected in the UK but is largely invisible in policy and practice. Widely publicised trends that include the increase in numbers of women in paid work are concealing the detail of the picture. The work that women do is still lower paid, part time and often short term. Discrimination still prevails in the workplace. Women still carry the burden of caring for others without pay or valuing of its contribution to society. The poverty of women who are old, from minority ethnic groups, are lesbian or disabled remains unacknowledged and unaddressed in the mainstream policy arena. Policy initiatives at local and national level specifically to address these barriers remain marginal.

Where communities are deprived, jobs non-existent, the physical environment in decay, women will be experiencing more disadvantage as a group than men but will be key activists in whatever level of community response is possible.

Health, education, access to services, community infrastructure, employment and are all factors and are all affected by poverty. There are other factors too. Women's lives are more complex, caught as they are between multiple responsibilities on the one hand and life long discrimination on the other. They have the most to gain from a holistic approach to urban renewal. Rural women would also gain from a strategy to address rural poverty.

Women may live in neighbourhoods, like all of us. But the nature of the inequality they face may mean that narrowly defined neighbourhood responses are not appropriate. Domestic violence, a key cause of women's poverty, usually means a woman has to seek safety, support and services from outside her neighbourhood. Black or minority ethnic women may rely on support from specific communities which lie outside government defined localities. Black women, minority ethnic women, refugee women, and lesbian women who all face discrimination may experience prejudiced attitudes within their localities and need to access support from outside them. These attitudes may constitute barriers to access and usage of ICT resources within a given neighbourhood.

Women's services and women's solutions need to be flexible and not hampered by an idealisation of home, neighbourhood or community, in policy or implementation. Community should also mean community of interest and this can need to have a wide geographic, even global spread. ICTs offer the potential to overcome limited definitions of community and locality and are already being used by women to access wider resources and organise for advocacy and to challenge structural inequalities and barriers to inclusion. ICT access points and people providing training resources need to be aware of the specific barriers and structural inequalities women face and working alongside women to use ICTs for equitable access to resources, social inclusion and empowerment. .

WHY ICTS FOR WOMEN ?

Speakers at the seminar identified that:

ICTs can be empowering for individual women and for women taking collective action. Women's role - mostly unpaid - in building community and reducing social exclusion is critical though undervalued. Seminar participants gave examples of how women and women's organisations can and are using ICTs to strengthen their capacity here

Investment in women's organisations strengthens communities as well as enabling individual women. This requires core funding for women's organisations as well as investment in equipping them with ICT resources. (See appendix of extracts from pre-seminar e-discussion for examples)

Women's ICT projects provide learning environments adapted to women's needs which mainstream training providers do not provide. In order to learn women need a holistic approach which addresses the purposes for which they wish to use ICTs. These purposes are defined by their roles as carers, community activists and volunteers in local communities, educators of children, as well as decision-makers in the public sphere and in employment. This contrasts with the narrow employment and technology led approach to learning that is more common in community and mainstream provision.

ICTs have a role to play in most areas of women's lives. We need or will shortly need and can apply them in at least the following ways contexts/ways:

- Commerce and enterprise
- Community enterprise
- Community, communication and collaboration
- Democratic participation
- Self help
- Education and training
- Information and services access
- Leisure, art and media
- Public services
- Voice and visibility
- Work/employment

Activities will include

- electronic publishing
- telemedicine
- web authoring
- online shopping
- teleworking
- web broadcasting
- interactive tv
- online networking

These activities (involving content, applications and services) will be locally initiated and developed but take place in an increasingly global context.

Seminar participants made a number of further suggestions **about why ICTs were relevant for women.**

Despite the problems and barriers they **identified women need access to ICTs in relation to all areas of their lives** including training and health to name just two. Examples were given of how without access and competence they are being disempowered and are in danger of being excluded from the new ways information is being provided and from the 'knowledge based society'. In one example lack of skills in using ICTs disempowered mothers who were unable to help their children with homework, where children are already using ICTs at school, while children who have home access to PCs were advantaged. School girls were using a local women's centre to learn how to use ICTs in an environment they found more conducive to their learning than their school computer centre or the local cybercafe, and then returned with their grandmothers and sisters who they passed their skills on to. Women who had learned how to use ICTs through courses run by their WEA found they were already helping them to overcome isolation and access information and resources which were not available within outside their immediate neighbourhoods

Seminar participants reported the following **benefits** experienced by women using ICTs:

- Provide useful information – access to world-wide information (e.g. health, campaigning..)
- Access to further training and skills – opens up opportunities for distance and flexible learning
- Enhance creative potential – use of multimedia and creative ICT tools
- Enable communication and self help – use of email to communicate : women acting as communicators in family/friendship networks. Creation of support and self help networks
- Improve employment potential – access to range of jobs
- Enable flexible working – teleworking – positive potential for women, although in practice emergence of call centres as major employment sector with low paid, casual work

Women Connect member organisations have reported the following benefits brought by integrating use of ICTs in the day to day work of their organisations:

- access to information and communication resources which they would not have gained otherwise at this point in time. Several are now designing their own learning packages to pass on their ICT skills to volunteers and staff
- improvements in communication
- access to relevant information for their work;
- using email to strengthen regional and shared interest networks which had previously been held together only by newsletter;
- providing internet access to new service users including young women, Asian women, older women, lesbians and disabled people;
- realisation of the potential for including more women this way including housebound women
- use of the internet for fund raising and short term campaigning,
- a collective voice to impact on policies.

During the seminar it was acknowledged that women world-wide and in the UK are already more than consumers of ICTs. They **are amongst the pioneers in progressive applications, are technicians trainers, and are themselves individually and collectively shapers and contributors.**

- This is not reflected in media images of women and needs to be addressed in order to enable women to use ICTs as a tool for empowerment and inclusion.

On the other hand **ICTs reflect and sometimes reinforce women's pre-existing disadvantages.**

- women who attend ICT training are often encouraged into low paid low status jobs in the ICT industries due to gender stereotyping.
- women are located in low paid part time work in ICT sector.

- fast growing new areas e.g. multimedia, Web publishing and new media are developing barriers to women's participation – long hours exclude women who have childcare or other responsibilities – women often work in admin or other lower status jobs in these industries
 - few women are located in technical jobs – still have 'building site' mentality where women have to cope with harassment, abuse or at the very least isolation and lack of support.
 - numbers of women studying Computer Science/Technology at Higher Education level has dropped over last 10 years – now only about 12% - this has impact on who is designing and developing systems and software.
- Seminar participants felt strongly that this is another form of exclusion of women and should be addressed within social exclusion interventions

Specific issues that shape women's access and usage of ICTs

Awareness and access

- ICT technology is not the answer in itself to poverty and social exclusion – design of applications, accessibility of 'access points', and the design and delivery of training in ways adapted to women's needs, concerns and purposes for usage will determine whether and how they are used by women and women's organisations
- Programmes should not adopt a numbers game approach i.e. mainly creating low level, part time possibly short term ICT based work for women to 'improve' the employment rates
- Women's poverty or social exclusion can arise from or be associated with a range of circumstances including mental health issues, disability, abuse and violence - hence training delivery and access provision must be flexible open to applications appropriate tailored to the needs of individual women
- Some women are put off by pornography on the internet or prevented from access by members of their community or family and need learning environments with protected access
- Women from all cultural backgrounds can experience disadvantage in access to learning and computers within the family as well as in society and their local community

Training access

- Approaches to training women to use ICT technology need to be appropriate to their interests and usage and flexible
- Women experiencing poverty must have their basic needs met in order to be able to take up opportunities to learn how to use ICTs. Women who are unable to meet basic needs associated with the mental and physical health and well being of dependants and themselves will not be open to learning new skills
- Women whose first language is not English or who have low literacy levels have language/barriers to ICT usage and need language and literacy support as part of their ICT training
- Costs are a significant barrier to usage and training take up for poor women, for whom household needs will always be a first priority. All costs associated with access and take up of training must therefore be met: transport, appropriate childcare and / or disability or elder care; and making appropriate practical and time tabling arrangements to accommodate other

- Because of the complexity of women's lives and their multiple roles women's learning needs are long term, intermittent i.e. can be interrupted, and require a flexible response which is tailored to individual circumstance
- Women need ongoing access and support in their take up and use of ICTs; a one off training programme is not sufficient to enable sustained learning and usage

Training approaches adapted to women's needs

- ICTs can present a danger of failure to individual women; computers are perceived by some women as a 'powerful' tool that are adapted to 'other's' expertise and there is a fear of technology because of its potentially disempowering effects
- There were many examples of women who have used ICTs for self empowerment, when they have had access to learning in an environment adapted to their needs and tailored to accommodate other demands on their time and income
- Women perceive ICTs to be are tools and mechanisms rather than ends in themselves; as such women need to see an identifiable purpose which relates to the realities of their lives in order to engage with them. Teaching usage of ICTs should for this reason be holistic, useful and valuable to the individual woman in her multiple roles in family, the community, public life or employment; they should be integrated and not separated from self development programmes
- ICT training for women should not be focussed exclusively on employment opportunity/access to paid work; in any case women are often fully committed with caring responsibilities and do not always want and are not always able to take up job opportunities
- Women need to learn at their own pace, in an environment where they do not feel judged or compared unfavourably to others ; some women felt 'overlooked' in public spaces such as libraries and found this off putting
- Many women need encouragement to overcome their own belief that they do not have the ability to learn how to use ICTs
- Women with school age children need encouragement and opportunities to learn as their children become users of ICTs in school etc
- Women only space for ICTs/training is crucial with appropriately trained staff who can respond to the range of issues including problems that women bring with them - these spaces and women's ICT projects should be community based
- Women centred training and space to access ICTs should also be concluded within mainstream provision

Women as shapers and technicians

- Women want their values and their responsibilities respected within services and training; they want to be shapers as well as users of the internet
- Women' organisations who are providing access to OICT training and usage need more access to space, hardware, training (all types), technical understanding (including maintenance)
- A diverse range of approaches to training and access is required to meet the multiple purposes for which women wish to use ICTs; women centred trainers and ICT projects are pioneering these
- People providing training and access to ICTs in the community sector need to and share the values of the community and women's community and voluntary sectors as well as having appropriate ICT training competencies
- Women in the ICT industries experience disadvantage
- Women as technicians and shapers of the Internet are too invisible, to women themselves and others.
- Women in communications and women in ICT training could have more influence
- More trainer training is needed to enable more women to become champions, shapers and technicians as well as users of the internet

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN EXISTING ICT PROVISION?

Provision which does and not/ addresses these issues

- Generally we conclude that there is not enough provision of either training or access to ICTs which addresses these issues. Provision where it exists is identified with the women's voluntary sector and in common with the rest of the sector grossly under-resourced. Existing services and new developments would benefit from secure funding, better links and more co-ordination.
- ICTs need to be integrated - by this we mean ICTs are not ultimately an end in themselves but should be applied for a purpose - within organisational practice, within an individual's life, as part of community action and so on. And ICTs should be shaped, developed and explored to create better means to meet women's needs.

- More women only provision and more women centred practice within other environments is needed (application of mainstreaming approach). There is a need for the right balance between financial support for purchase and maintenance of suitable up to date equipment – hardware and software etc - and funding to develop and sustain appropriate human resources which is critical.
- Initial contact with training and education is important – women especially from poor communities don't feel confident enough to go to FE college – particularly for technology subjects where most students are 16 year old boys
- There is discrimination against women in the traditional, main pathways through education and employment. This leads to resistance to learning is a serious barrier to women's access to ICTs. It must be addressed in order to enable women's access to ICT training through mainstream pathways which complement alternative provision
- Need for community based provision – adult education centres, but often these are under resourced, don't emphasise ICT (lack of equipment) also usual to provide only Word Processing type courses which don't encourage women to open up new opportunities but stereotype them into office jobs..
- Need for crèches, small groups, personal support and development – areas of expertise that women's training projects have developed over past 15 – 20 years and which have wealth of 'good practice' that has been proven to work!

Good practice that already exists: the seminar identified a range of provision:

- women's centres - a critical safe space, providing positive learning environments, highly valued, but grossly under-resourced
- libraries - a more public space, useful where linked with assistance and where charges were not too minimal
- specific projects for ethnic minority groups – providing language support and a safe space for women of black and minority ethnic communities
- specific projects for young women, older women, lesbians, providing outreach and supportive learning environments tailored to interest and need
- electronic village halls like Manchester's one for women, with a range of training opportunities for using ICTs and multi media facilities
- women friendly community learning centres and classes, often providing outreach, and introductory classes, linked to a range of other learning opportunities, such as WEA

- enterprise centres / entrepreneurial schemes - useful when trainers are aware of women's learning needs – often not the case – and when women are identified with the enterprise culture
- women's training centres - though many are losing funding.
- It was noted that word of mouth publicity can extend take up by women but only where projects have decent life spans

Challenges to appropriate ICT access, usage and learning: the seminar identified the following:

- unsustainable funding arrangements/environments
- short termism where short term projects and limited funding cannot promote greater use of ICTs or sustain existing projects
- severe lack of free/very low cost but high quality appropriate childcare (local, culturally sensitive, permanent, up to 14 years with out of school as well as under 5s) which is essential for women on various kinds of courses but also for women more generally involved in non qualification based self development/community development activities
- lack of permanent or long term funding for women only training
- finding resources to keep up with the pace of change in ICTs
- lack of hardware including flexible hardware e.g. laptops
- security problems where equipment is located in community based premises
- underused IT resources, for instance in schools and colleges. These could with the right investment and co-ordination be appropriate locations for developing women's capacity with ICTs
- resources put into provision which is not women centred, and therefore not used by many women
- trainers without appropriate awareness of power and discrimination issues in ICTs and in relation to women
- lack of co-ordinated, inclusive networks
- insufficient attention to security and safety issues in internet usage
- insufficient attention to filtering out unwanted and offensive material on the internet in training and access points

- discrimination leading to resistance to learning in the traditional, main pathways through education and employment
- IT training for women is often limited to word processing skills and women are not encouraged to go for higher level training
- some minority ethnic women cannot access training because of language barriers
- qualification led ICT training with associated risks of failure for individuals and projects
- ICT development needs to be more participatory, fun and widely interpreted and applied in an integrated way
- lack of visible role models – men appear to be the 'owners' of ICTs

APPENDIX A

Women Connect

BACKGROUND

The project began work in January 1998. The project co-ordinators, Marion Scott and Margaret Page undertook a promotion, information and selection exercise and 20 organisations have come into membership.

THE NETWORK

The 20 organisations are spread throughout the regions of England and form a diverse group of grass roots and larger or national organisations, with varying degrees of experience of using information and communication technologies. They work in a variety of communities, policy, service or campaigning areas, and have many shared and some differing concerns and expertise. What they have in common is an understanding of the value of networking and a wish to explore new ways of communicating and exchanging information, in order to achieve their organisational objectives.

LEARNING COMMUNITY

Member organisations and resource contacts will aim to build a network of organisations who are learning together and from each other on agendas of their own. They will be exploring when it is useful to network and how to find time to network and use electronic communication and networking effectively.

SUSTAIN AND TRANSFER

Women Connect aims to create a sustainable, equality based, transferable set of working practices which can be adapted for use by other organisations.

The project will provide co-ordination, training, advice, support and development to all member organisations and equipment will be provided to some. There will be events for networking and development. Members will take part in evaluation of the project work and dissemination of results. There will be an on line publication or handbook for wider use within UK based community networks.

RESOURCE CONTACTS

These are individual women who will act as 'voluntary' resource contacts and become part of the network. They will help member organisations to access information, and will include Information and Communication Technology (ICT)/internet experts and practitioners with experience in working on women's issues in particular policy areas or in fundraising and lobbying for example.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Margaret Page/ Marion Scott, Joint Project Co-ordinators, Women Connect, c/o Community Development Foundation, 60 Highbury Grove, London N52AG
Tel 0171 226 5375 or 0171 354 2714 <http://www.womenconnect.org.uk>
e-mail co-ord@womenconnect.org.uk

APPENDIX B

**Women, Renewal and ICTs - what policies and practices help?
a seminar organised by Women Connect for the PAT 15
at the DTI, 151 Buckingham Palace Rd., London SW1 W9SS
July 19 1999**

- 10.0 Registration
refreshments
- 11.0 Welcome - Jane Berry, Project Development Manager at the
National Rural Enterprise Centre, chair of seminar
Marion Scott and Margaret Page, Women Connect
John Humphreys, Project Manager, Secretary of PAT 15
Clem Herman, Manchester Women's Electronic Village Hall
Romi Jones, Fourth Action Consultancy
- 12.0 Workshops 1
policy and practice at the grass roots - setting the agenda
- 1.0 Poster gallery - workshop 1
Lunch
- 2.0 Panel response to workshops
- 2.30 Workshops 2
policy and practice - key points for PAT 15
- 3.30 Summary of key points
Next steps
- 4.0 Close

APPENDIX C

**Women, Renewal and ICTs - what policies and practices help?
a seminar organised by Women Connect for the PAT 15 at the DTI, 151 Buckingham
Palace Road, London SW1W 9SS**

July 19 1999

ATTENDANCE LIST

Sarah Moss	- Cambridge Women's Resource Centre
Joyce Grandison	- Tower Hamlets Women's Health & Family Services
Jean O'Keeffe	- Keighley Women's Centre
Annette Dent	- Keighley Women's Centre
Shiraz Kaintal	- Women's Help Centre (Birmingham)
Daisy Khera	- Women's Help Centre (Birmingham)
Karen Payne	- Island Women's Aid (Isle of Wight)
Mary Granville-White	- Women's Health Information & Support Service (Norwich)
Louie Hart	- Association of Greater London Older Women
Manjit Dehal	- Awaaz
Shirin Khan	- Awaaz
Selen Cavcav	- Imece Turkish Women's Organisation
Carol Bush	- Stevenage and N Herts Women's Centre
Theresa Wray	- Stevenage and N Herts Women's Centre
Kate Roe	- National Women's Network
Sarah Lord	- Women's Resource Centre (London)
Janet Veitch	- Women's National Commission
Mary McDonald	- Women's Unit Cabinet Office
Ereli Pengelly	- Women's Unit Cabinet Office
Annie Oliver	- Single Parent Action Network
Patricia Alert	- Single Parent Action Network (London)
Mary Conneely	- Newtec
Clare Hyde	- Calderdale Women's Centre
Clem Herman	- Women's Electronic Village Hall (Manchester)
<i>(Speaker & Facilitator)</i>	
Romi Jones	- Fourth Action Consultancy
<i>(Speaker & Facilitator)</i>	
Deborah Hart	- Microsystem
Karen Banks	- GreenNet/APC Women's Programme
Kevin Harris	- CDF
John Humphreys	- DTI
<i>(Speaker & Panel Member)</i>	
Mairi Thomson (part)	- DTI
Jane Berry	- Ruralnet
<i>(Chair & Facilitator)</i>	
Marion Scott	- Women Connect
<i>(Organiser & Panel Member)</i>	

Margaret Page - Women Connect
(Organiser, Facilitator & Panel Member & Speaker)

APPENDIX D

EXTRACTS FROM THE E-DISCUSSION PRIOR TO THE SEMINAR

Some ideas I have been thinking about :

ICTs as a means of accessing information to improve social conditions - discovering benefit entitlements, housing info and other resource networks. The need is there but the areas of access still limited.

Our Resource Centre is part of the Women Connect Network and aims to improve its service to the women who use it by accessing information on a national scale through the internet and our own connection with other women's groups.

We have a very valuable role to play in that we fully acknowledge that people living in poorer neighbourhoods do not have the means to support home access to this type of technology and yet they do need access to information on a wide range of issues. Children are particularly disadvantaged with the focus on technology within the school curriculum if they do not have home access to a PC. I have found out that Stevenage library (part of the Herts Library Network) allows free access to the internet for children under 16 years of age for one hour per week - proof of age required. Adults can use their internet access for the following charges: 10 mins - £1.00, half an hour - £3.00, one hour -£5.00. Again, money is an issue here - it may sound a reasonable expense but the time needed to spend on the computer for research can mean that the charge mounts up.

Computer literacy for adults is an issue worth spending some time on - again, cost of access, location, learning support, and a focus for the future on the learning received. Shared access to technology is vital - women living in small rural communities have additional costs with travel to gain shared access. Libraries are often situated in larger towns - my experience of mobile libraries was that they only dealt with the issue of books, a most valuable resource but that there was no small computer system for use on board (mind you, that was some time ago when I used it and things may have changed).

Funding for updating resources in centres such as ours - we rely on donations and funding from local authority networks but there is a very real need to source funding for particular projects eg a printer for common access, upgrading of programmes.

Finally, the issue of cultural identification with the technology. This is a wide-ranging subject but the limitations imposed upon the self by cultural conditioning and experiences will colour self-worth and self-determination.

Theresa Wray
IT support at Stevenage and North Herts Women's Resource Centre

Theresa Wray makes the point which I believe is pivotal. ICT has to be seen to be relevant to women's lives. Women must be able to see the point right now, not just for some visionary, technological future. If we cannot demonstrate how IT saves money, time and energy, the valuable and short supply resources that women have, then they will not take part.

We are hampered by only having one computer situated in the main office, which is not a public area. However, we have invited women to bring into the Centre a www they might have noticed on the television, or in a newspaper or a supermarket. We then do a one to one, talking them through reaching the website and moving around to see whatever takes their eye.

After a short session in the auctions, during which we made a bid, one woman said "Well, this is a bigger buzz than going to the Co-op!" She is unlikely ever to shop on the net, but she had fun and then wanted to visit a religious site.

Getting information, as Theresa points out, is one area which is easily accepted. We often phone Healthbox and women are used to that. It is not a huge step from a handheld phone to the computer 'phone' in order to get relevant health and welfare information.

I spoke to a woman at another Women's Centre who said their main problem was not being able to see how to physically get on-line and manage what came next. If we are to reach women through our Centres, we will need to set up a very clear and straightforward introduction process. eg After the Northern Women's Centres Conference in March, two centres, who had all the equipment but did not know where to start, went on-line after hearing Margaret talk about it.

They were also encouraged by Keighley's experience (and success!) with Women Connect.

Another area where IT will matter, is to mothers who feel they will not be able to keep up with children using computers at school. We are concerned about the ever increasing gap between children's experience and learning and their parents'. Just knowing how to 'take off and land' would bolster a parent's self esteem plus give them some status with their children.

We see IT as essential for the future growth of women's centres nationally. Centres are a safe access to IT for women who find other public arenas too intimidating. We are considering the feasibility of getting another computer and allowing women to check the cost of their usage time on the screen and to pay that amount. We can show them how to use it economically - another learning incentive?

Jean O'Keeffe, Keighley Women's Centre

Re help women in "poor neighbourhoods"

- feel less excluded
- access opportunities
- gain information that may not otherwise be accessible in isolated areas
- keep abreast of IT initiatives and practice skills in order to capitalise on work, voluntary and community opportunities.
- campaigning and lobbying
- gaining support and encouragement
- convenience of access, ie. regarding transport, childcare needs etc
- social, leisure and interest expansion

Ways to Access

- Access must be free
- Creche must be provided free
- Access and training must be local
- Women must be able to put in time and effort of their choice
- Friendly/safe environment

Employment

- Building confidence
- Increasing social skills and combating isolation
- Conversance with new skills
- Practice
- Maximising employment chances

Background Ashfield Women's Centre;

Young girls continue to use service, have introduced grandmothers and sisters. This group also passing on skills to other women wishing to use the internet.

People restricted by health needs. eg ME sufferer able to use because able to timetable this activity to suit her capabilities.

Nottinghamshire continues to have pit closures eg Calverton Colliery (the new superpit) closes this week, with unemployment consequences for the area.

Ashfield Women's Centre; Mission Statement includes commitment to regeneration of local communities has work cut out!!

Norma & Pauline - Ashfield Women's Centre

ASHIELD WOMEN'S CENTRE

A case study in women's internet access and usage

Ashfield women's centre (insert description from updated web pages on WC site) recently advertised internet access. They needed to boost their usage – particularly among younger women. They had found that while lots of women were coming in to attend specific activities, very few were dropping in to use the facilities – café, workshop and meeting spaces, a place to meet friends, etc. During the school holidays- they found their usage unexpectedly escalated.....

In the last week they have had queues forming of school girls desperate to find a place to do their homework -which relies on internet access. The Women's Centre is unbelievably the only access point they can use. They have been offering their PC 9-5 for two weeks now- and introduced a booking system. When it occurred to them they were about to get a huge phone bill.

The local library- offers free internet access in term time only- and have closed both the internet access and their homework room (funded by the local council) for the summer holidays. Ashtel, council subsidised, is for over 18 year olds only. Part funded through SRB, like the Women's Centre, it is run on commercial lines, and recently charged the Women's Centre – also funded by SRB- a fat fee for looking at their PC. The Cybercafe restricts usage to people on benefit only – this exclude young people and women who are not eligible for benefit.

Ashfield Women's Centre are going to lobby their MP and local councillors, and write to David Blunkett. They have pointed out that Tony Blair is urging schools to use the internet- but without thinking through the resources actually needed. She wants funds to pay for the service the women's' centre is offering. Unlike the library or other access points, women of all ages who come in are using it for personal development; the school girls have said they prefer to come to the WC as it a safe space- free from male prowlers. Students are with encouragement looking at university sites and thinking about applying for places. A woman with disabilities has volunteered to help --it will be the first time she has felt confident enough to leave her home.