



CYBER INFRASTRUCTURE:

A WOMEN'S ISSUE, TOO!

**Advancing a Gender-Sensitive Approach to ICT Policy in
Uganda**



WOUGNET
Policy Report

Foreword

This policy report was created by WOUNET with a team of students for the course ‘Advanced Media Governance’ at McGill University in Canada under the guidance of Prof. Becky Lentz.

The team consisted of Rebecca Borkowsky, LJ De Gara, Kelsey Frandsen, Julia Grandfield, Anna Lina Junghänel, Noteh Krauss, Emmanuelle Lajoie, Giuliana Mazzetta, and Lydia Mullen. The students came from a variety of backgrounds academically and consisted of a mix of Canadian, American, and German students. The students were brought together by a strong motivation to learn about the emerging field of Internet Governance and work towards the protection and improvement of a better cyberspace for everyone.

This initiative was born in response to a call by Prof. Lentz for NGO partners for seminar course on Internet and Human Rights (Internet governance). This call aligned well with one of the issues WOUNET has been keenly following, namely, the issue of cyber security versus Internet Freedoms. More so, what do such debates mean in a country like Uganda with a relatively low internet user base - where among other things we have a 2013 launched ugCERT (www.ug-cert.ug/ <<http://www.ug-cert.ug/>>) but with worries from the public as to exactly what this covers and addresses. Indeed, as was noted in the 2013 Stockholm Internet Forum, if the internet is developed in our countries without attention to Internet Freedoms, would we still want to promote access to such Internet?

McGill Student Team





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Internet use continues to grow worldwide, the debate between greater Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom is also expanding. Going online presents many opportunities and dangers. There are hackers and fraudsters, but online forums also present a place for people to express themselves, find useful information, and grow their businesses. With 6 million Ugandans now online, the Ugandan government must contemplate what Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom mean for the Ugandan people. Women's interests should be at the center of this discussion, yet Uganda lacks ICT policy addressing this question.

Women are uniquely affected by ICT policy decisions as the Internet presents a space and opportunity for women's greater involvement in society and the economy as a whole. Women are also distinctively at risk of abuse online. Women's organizations, especially those with expertise on ICT issues should play an active role in national discussions regarding a balanced policy on Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom. Efficient, balanced ICT policy in Uganda will only be achieved when women are recognized and included as relevant stakeholders.

Are Ugandan Women Living On the Wrong Side of the Digital Divide?

The majority of Internet users in Uganda are residents of the nation's capital, Kampala, which boasts that 53% of its residents are connected to the Internet, often by its more than 200 cyber cafes--a percentage unparalleled among sub-Saharan metropolises. Despite the enthusiasm for connectivity in the capital, the rural regions of Uganda remain grossly underserved. More than 90% of citizens in rural regions, particularly the Northern Region, do not have consistent access to electricity or telecommunication services, to say nothing of Internet access. The digital divide in Uganda is framed almost entirely into the harsh division between rural and urban.

While freedom to access the Internet is generally unfettered, the access is mainly restricted by infrastructural and economic reasons. Many Ugandans, mainly those living in rural areas, have no Internet access. This is in part due to electrification issues, upon which the Internet depends. In 2009 just 9% of Uganda's households had electrification while 50% of people in urban areas had access to electricity. A recent doubling of the power generation capacity was possible through the power sector reform, although there are still very high system losses. Through early and successful ICT sector reforms, an expansion of mobile phone penetration was possible. At present, mobile cellular signals cover almost 100% of the population, while 67% have mobile phones. Yet improvements are needed that include reduction of broadband costs as well as tax burdens, which are three times as high as in average in Africa.

For those Ugandans who are online, the Internet is only "partly free". According to the latest Freedom House rankings, the Ugandan government is increasing its surveillance of Ugandan citizens, thus rendering the Internet less conducive to freedom of expression and discussion. Added to these digital challenges the fact that at present, Ugandan women suffer from a number of inequities that increase their marginal status on Internet governance issues, or "the policies, laws and regulations that shape the evolution and use of the Internet".



CYBER INFRASTRUCTURE: A WOMEN'S ISSUE, TOO! ADVANCING A GENDER-SENSITIVE APPROACH TO ICT POLICY IN UGANDA



Internet Governance: The policies, laws and regulations that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.

Milton Mueller, Networks and States



ICT: Information Communications Technology. Includes such technologies as Internet and telecommunications.

One of the most pressing barriers affecting women is literacy. While 73% of the Ugandan population over the age of 15 can read or write at a basic level, literate men far outnumber literate women: 82% of men are literate compared with only 64% of women. Furthermore, only 23% of adult women in Uganda have any secondary education- secondary education defined as education beyond the age of twelve. The Ugandan digital divide is a gendered divide, as women are confronted by a multi-layered set of barriers to accessing ICTs. These barriers span across a number of issues, including working infrastructure, physical mobility, and limited affordability. Given the text-based nature of most Internet communication, this gendered illiteracy presents a second cleavage along which the digital divide must be examined: structural differences between men's and women's access.

While there is little evidence of a gendered divide at the geographic level, rural women still face unique barriers to access. In contrast to urban centres, rural areas are often serviced by Internet telecenters, a central hub where a given population (sometimes tens of thousands) has access to Internet-connected computers. Travel time to telecenters can be long, and a limited number of computers further limits access. Connections are often slow, and pay-per-minute access can make them costly. Aside from distance and cost, women may also face resistance from family members.

Research suggests that there are several reasons why African women use the Internet less often than African men. Firstly, African women have less free time to experiment new technology. Women are also less likely to have the necessary income to buy a phone and do not perceive the immediate material benefits associated with the Internet. A case study from neighbouring Mozambique reveals that poor, rural, illiterate women felt excluded from the Internet, computers and other technologies. They said that these technologies were not designed for "people like them." This reflection is likely to be transferable to poor, rural women of Uganda.



Women in Uganda also have the fourth highest fertility rate worldwide, with the average woman giving birth six times over the course of her life; the median age at first birth is 18. Complications for mother and child alike are despairingly common: infant mortality is 62 deaths per 1,000 live births, and maternal mortality is 310 per 100,000 live births.

The low birth age, high birth rate, and limited educational attainment common across Uganda mean that women have fewer opportunities to engage with civil society outside of the family structure. The government, led by President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, has made a concerted effort to address these issues. At present, women represent 35% of parliamentary seats in Uganda, and they have reserved seats on the National Resistance Council. However, women are still underrepresented in positions of authority, and this inequity translates into decision making about ICT policy.

As more and more Ugandans go online, the Ugandan Government will need to fully consider what Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom mean for the Ugandan people, but especially for women. These issues have been discussed by Internet governance scholars at the global level. And at the recent 2013 Stockholm Internet Forum, balancing security online and individual rights was discussed as one of the most significant issues affecting Internet governance today.

ICT use can be considered a gendered issue, as technology related violence against women is prevalent. Such forms of female-targeted ICT use “include cyber stalking, sexual harassment, surveillance, and unauthorized use and manipulation of personal information, including image and video format.” Further, “regardless of a group’s geographical, economic, political, or social experience, women experience twice as many challenges to accessing the Internet as men do” In addition, a 2008 survey revealed that in Uganda, 9% of men knew what the Internet was, while only 4% of women were aware of the Internet. Even in these small numbers, the number of men who are aware is more than double that of women, meaning that women’s potential for Internet access is also significantly lower than men’s. In other words, there is a gendered inaccessibility of the Internet in Uganda.

Furthermore, as Uganda’s leadership contemplates a strategy for ICT policy, the unique opportunities and dangers that the Internet presents for women need to be taken into account. Uganda will not be able to create an inclusive and balanced policy for both women and men without considering how gender affects Internet use.

Womens’ use of ICT is crucial to creating balanced ICT policies that are both efficient and sustainable. At this point, the Uganda Communications Commission includes space for women regulators, but it still does not adequately incorporate a “wired” woman’s perspective. Only by integrating representatives of women who understand gender-sensitive ICT- issues into the policy-making process will it be possible to address crucial development opportunities and infrastructural gaps. Broadening the conception of who has a stake in ICT policy will inevitably produce a more robust and prosperous future for Uganda. Balancing Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom cannot be achieved without including women in policy discussions.



“DIGITAL INCLUSION” INCLUDES WOMEN!

Women are essential to decisions on Internet governance because of the way that women’s issues translate to the online world. Women’s freedom and security are uniquely affected by policy decisions regarding Cybersecurity. Besides, women bring new voices and experiences to the discussions on Internet governance. Pro-actively supporting women’s participation in civil society’s networks, technical committees, and decision-making spaces is crucial to the Internet governance discourse.

The Women of Uganda Network aims to take advantage of the opportunities that ICT policymaking presents to aid in sustainable development of Uganda. With sixty-two listed member organizations WOUGNET is instrumental in the sharing of information and expertise between civil associations, NGOs and other groups employing ICTs in Uganda. WOUGNET has a three-pronged approach to its work in ICT where its activities are grouped under Information Sharing and Networking, Technical Support and Gender and lastly, ICT Policy Advocacy.



UGANDAN ICT POLICY MAKING: A PLATFORM TO BUILD UPON

The trend of ICT policy in Uganda has been moving towards greater privatization while maintaining an active government role in regulating telecommunications. The ICT history in Uganda can be seen within the pre-liberalization and post-liberalization climates. Between 1970 and 1986, the country was focused on the nation-building capacities of ICTs. At the same time, the government closely controlled the newspapers, radio and television broadcasts. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press were limited and constrained, and dissenters risked political reprisals. Independent print media was banned, and for a short while, even listening to a foreign radio station was criminalised. In addition to the censorship regime, during this period governmental bodies responsible for ICT implementation were largely inefficient. Due to a combination of inefficient government and censoring of telecommunications media services in Uganda were poor and there was little innovation in the industry across the country.

In 1996 and 1997, the government implemented policy decisions that reformed the ICT industry through liberalization and privatization processes by issuing the Telecommunications Sector Policy Statement and the Uganda Communications Act. These reforms marked the end of the previous era and signified the beginning of major structural change within the ICT industry. The Ugandan government's motivation was to make ICT services more affordable, accessible, and to foster technology innovation. Their goal was at least partially achieved as liberalization did contribute to lower prices for mobile phone and Internet services.

Another significant policy development was the Rural Communications Development Policy (RCDF) of 2001. It explicitly focused on rural and universal access with an overarching aim to promote regional, economic, and social equality. This policy is particularly relevant to the ICT industry as it addresses the significant regional digital divide in the country. Although the government has been taking significant steps to develop ICT in the country since liberalizing the industry, the government has not considered how Telecommunications policy particularly affects women.

The Ugandan regulatory context is characterized by work in tandem by both governmental and non-governmental actors. In 2003, spurred by several technical and academic institutions, the Ministry of Housing, Works, and Communications (now defunct) published a policy framework in conjunction with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. This comprehensive document outlined a long series of recommendations for a national telecommunications policy. In addition, the Ministry included attention to the importance of engendering such a policy, and including women as equal participants in its development and execution. Though this action had good intent, it was not carried out by the subsequent legislation.



The Uganda Communications Act of 2013 formalizes convergence in the ICT sector with regulation of the telecomm and the broadcasting sector now brought under the same regulator – whose name was chosen to remain the Ugandan Communications Commission (UCC). Prior to this act, the telecom sector was regulated by the UCC while the broadcasting sector was regulated by the Broadcasting Council.. The UCC has been in place since 1998 established after the 1996/1997 Act. The UCC is also tasked to include three women on its board.

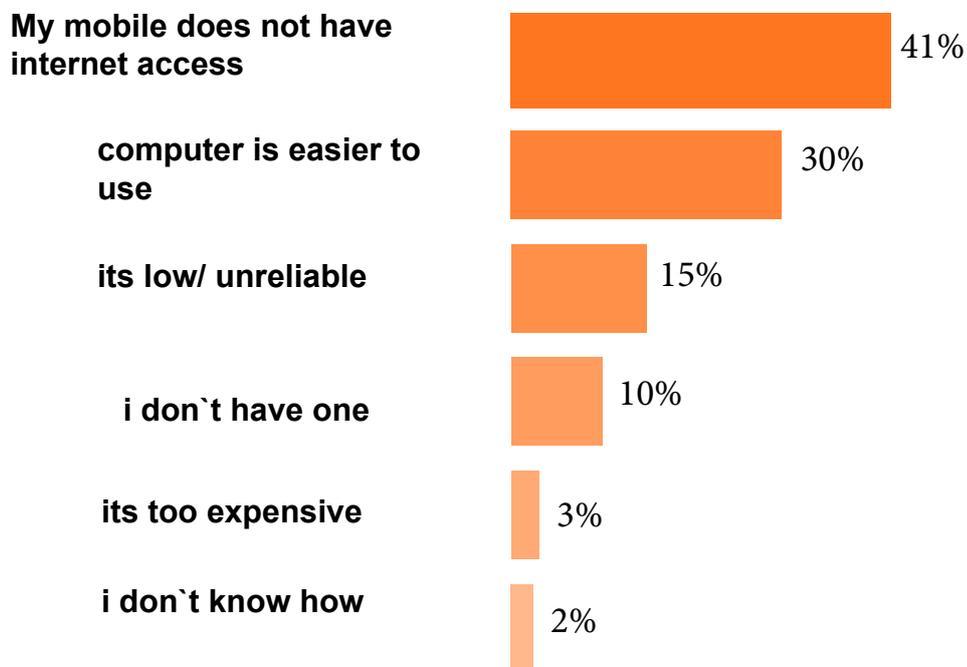
The Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), for instance, is a stakeholder in ICT policy formulation insofar as it is able to represent an intersection of Ugandan women’s needs and interests as they relate to ICT. Additionally, WOUGNET also possesses political experience and technical expertise. Both ICTs and community organizations have the ability to mobilize Ugandans to express their political interests. Therefore, by integrating women’s interest into the policy advisory process, the government of Uganda will be able to cultivate a more inclusive and sustainable policy environment. In keeping with the mission of the UCC, a consideration of groups, such as WOUGNET, is important for Uganda’s moving forward.

While Ugandan women may not be a large faction of the online community today, they matter because of their future potential as Internet users. Evidence shows that when given the tools, especially those that can be tailored to their own needs, Ugandan women will embrace technology. More specifically, Ugandan women have been embracing technology equally to men as robust users of SMS and cell phones. Mobile devices are already embraced by women, and have the potential to be used as tools for accessing the Internet in the future.

Figure 2: Barriers to Women's Internet Access

Uganda women answered the questions:

What is the main reason you don't access the internet through a mobile more often or at all?



The graphic illustrated desire for internet access through available mobile technologies. Women have actively embraced the use of cell phones, and we can thus project that they will equally embrace the internet with zeal and innovation. source: Globalscan survey in Uganda, Egypt, India, And Mexico, August - September 2012: Expert Interview: Dalberg analysis.

Information taken from graph in: Intel Corporation, and Dalberg Global Development Advisor: "Women and the Web: Bridging the Internet Gap and Creating New Global Opportunities in Low and Middle-Income Countries," Intel Corporaion, 2012, 57.



Women have their own unique set of interests and needs regarding their engagement with the Internet. This digital space offers women a forum where they can express themselves, communicate with others, find new information, expand businesses, and countless other opportunities.

Women's economic empowerment is a key driver of sustainable development, which is often achieved through gender-specific policy perspectives. In order for the Internet to be a democratic platform for online communication, it is imperative that as it develops, women are kept in mind. Gaining equality in the realm of ICT would have effective implications for a country's economic and technological development. For instance, illuminating gender discrimination in employment could boost productivity 40% and, if women's employment rates became equal to men's, GDP could rise by 14% by 2020. Opportunities for economic development such as this demonstrate the importance of an engendered policy. As noted in a Globescan survey, women stated that they would use Internet on their mobile phones if it were available and accessible. However, women as a group are specifically and distinctively prevented from accessing mobile broadband, due to impediment of inferior Internet infrastructure.

At present, the Ugandan government has policies concerning Cybersecurity in the Ugandan digital environment.

However, very few Ugandans know about such laws. Even with limited awareness and sensitization about such policies, the government has demonstrated sufficient interest in Cybersecurity measures. For example, the recently developed Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) is charged with the complex and contentious task of tracking cyber crimes. However, the degree to which it has been implemented is largely unknown to the public. Uganda is at a crucial juncture in developing an ICT policy that is equitable and accessible, but nonetheless secure for women.

The digital divide faced by women in Uganda coupled with the fast paced nature of the Internet's development leaves many cleavages in which violence against women (VAW) can take place online. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines VAW as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". Without a responsible framework for cyber security, violence against women has the potential to disseminate through ICTs across long distances and to remote areas quickly and in high volumes. WOUGNET and other women's organizations across the globe recognize the significance of cyber violence and its harmful effects on women, and have taken part in programs like the "Take Back Tech! To End Violence Against Women" campaign, which calls upon women to take control of ICT technology and utilize it to bring attention to VAW online. The "Take Back Tech!" campaign found common cases of technology-related VAW documented include cyber stalking, sexual harassment, surveillance, privacy violations and the unauthorized use and manipulation of personal information including images and videos.

To be sure, while responsible development of cyber security is necessary to protect women from cyber violence, the Internet is also a useful tool for women to seek assistance and connect anonymously with various centres and organizations who assist survivors of VAW. Anonymity is only achieved when users are confident that their actions are not being tracked, and that they can seek safety without fear of repudiation. Additionally, the right to privacy online allows women to decide how they want to share their personal information through ICTs. The framework of Internet governance should continue to develop such that it protects women online, while not interfering with women's ability to exercise their rights online.

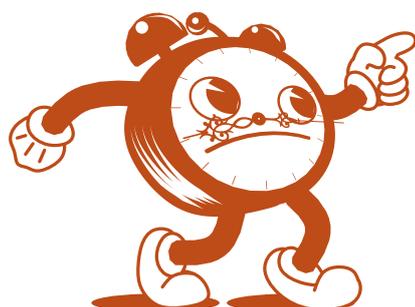
For most Ugandan people, mobile phone use is the only way people are granted access to the Internet and the digital world of information consumption, production, and exchange. However, there are two major barriers to entry: cost and giving upon one's personal privacy.

Firstly, registering a SIM card is mandatory, with all unregistered SIM cards in Uganda supposed to be deactivated by of August 2013, this leaves some Ugandan mobile subscribers to opt out of the mobile internet revolution. However, the deadline for deactivating SIM cards were extended. The requirement for mobile phone users to provide personal data, including private addresses and photographs, in order to purchase and register a SIM card becomes increasingly questionable. In a surveillance-susceptible environment, Ugandan mobile users sacrifice their privacy and can potentially be located and tracked at any time. This viably heightens existing anxieties amongst females about stalking and cyberstalking.

Secondly, after the 2011 elections, in response to the distress of activist and opposition groups- the national regulator requested that ISPs temporarily block citizen's access to Facebook and Twitter. That same year, the Ugandan government was alleged to have ordered telecoms companies to block and regulate the use of some keywords in SMS texts, including "bullet" "Mubarak" and "Ben Ali." Message filtering based on content poses serious implications on Ugandan ICT policy, as freedom of speech is restricted in the name of national security. A practical application of this is the issue of anonymity: Women may value the ability to remain anonymous, and thus ungendered, online. Under the veil of anonymity, female Internet users feel free to express themselves without having to endure the repercussions of their female voices, such as stalking, discredit, or punishment. While neither SIM registration nor SMS tracking are concrete policies issues regarding the Internet, they reflect the government's increasing values of security and surveillance over privacy and freedom of expression- issues that affect women directly.

WEIGHING THE OPTIONS: CYBERSECURITY VS. INTERNET FREEDOM

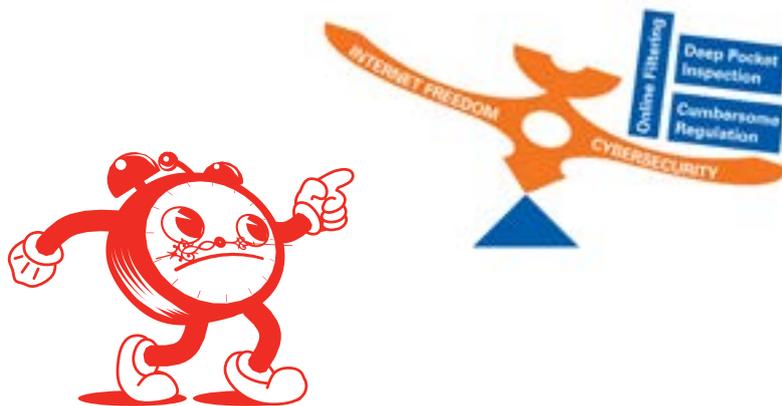
As Uganda considers future approaches to ICT policy, there are three paths: Cybersecurity Maximalism, Internet Freedom Maximalism, and a balanced perspective between these two extremes.



Maximalism: The action of taking the strongest position on the spectrum of a philosophical idea.

CYBERSECURITY MAXIMALISM

Figure 3: Weighing the Options: Cybersecurity Maximalism



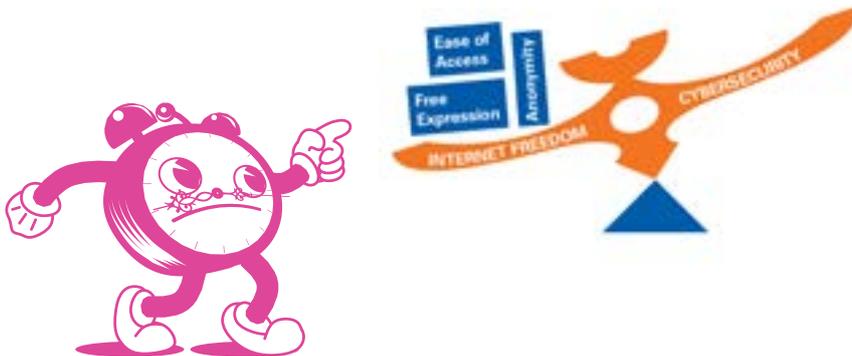
A first possibility for an Internet policy is one governed by the principle of Cybersecurity created via the process of securitization where something is labeled as threatened and in need of protection. In this view, Cybersecurity policies are aimed at extreme forms of protection. Cybersecurity is presented as a way to stop a 'cyber-disaster from occurring'. A cyber-disaster is a scenario wherein terrorists, hackers and/or viruses take over vulnerabilities in the national network structure to shut down power plants, stop the water from running, steal all the money in the banks, thus seriously damaging society. Whether this threat is real or perceived is irrelevant. It is the believable prospect of cyber-disaster that creates fear in citizens allowing a Cybersecurity maximalist environment to be cultivated. Citizens support such measures out of fear of the Internet in their individual lives, for example, cyber-stalking and cyber-violence. Citizens are warned that just like a hacker could steal their financial information, hackers can also rob the national banks. By connecting individual and state-level fears, a Cybersecurity maximalist policy earns the government the role of protector.

A policy based on Cybersecurity maximalism requires that citizens and consumers are willing to forfeit more of their individual power and authority to the government in exchange for protection. Theoretically, the people are more trusting of the government, and the government assumes the role of 'hero' in exchange for protection from cyber- 'bad-guys'. In this utopian cybersecure environment, the Internet becomes a completely securitized space free of fraud, hacking, or even viruses, because of strict Internet monitoring and swift prosecution of cyber-criminals.

However, living a life of fear is neither a desirable nor admirable goal for a society. Increasing cybersecurity measures, online freedom to express and discuss diminishes resulting in growing discontent and alienation among Internet users. Trust among individuals disintegrates over time as citizens are bombarded with the message to fear strangers. Furthermore, Cybersecurity maximalism requires the government to employ large numbers of people to monitor and control all Internet traffic. Internet users who disagree with such measures regress further underground, making them appear more threatening whilst becoming harder to track. The population grows weary of constant surveillance and resentment slowly builds.

INTERNET FREEDOM MAXIMALISM

Figure 4: Weighing the Options: Internet Freedom Maximalism



Internet Freedom presents an opposing ideal to the Cybersecurity approach. Internet Freedom values liberty over protection in its approach to Internet Governance. Aaronson defines Internet Freedom “as the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet. We define Internet openness as policies and procedures that allow netizens to make their own choices about applications and services to use and which lawful content they want to access, create or share with others”.

In its extreme form, Internet Freedom is an Internet without any regulation or oversight. Rules and Regulation can be cumbersome – a free Internet gives individuals the space to build websites and programs without needing permission from anyone. Furthermore, Internet users can freely post whatever they choose as well, again without any permissions, hurdles, or formal reprisals. A free Internet gives people the liberty to use Internet space in any way they choose with total freedom.

Milton Mueller notes this friction between Internet governance and states and concludes that “there is a strong and persistent tension between state sovereignty, which is territorially bounded, and the non-territorial space for social interaction created by networked computers” No Internet currently available is absolutely free, since it must be accessed from either government or corporate or some combination of the two service providers that are bound by national laws. As states have become more involved in cyber-space over time, the Internet has become less free. According to the Freedom House’s 2013 Freedom on the Net Report, “Of particular concern are the proliferation of laws, regulations and directives which will restrict Internet speech.”



ADVOCATING A BALANCED APPROACH

When building a national ICT policy that incorporates multi-stakeholder interests, policymakers need to consider the costs and impacts of either extreme: Cybersecurity maximalism vs. Internet Freedom maximalism. Adopting either a Cybersecurity-based approach or an Internet Freedom-based approach has respective advantages and disadvantages.

By building policy based on the principles of Cybersecurity, the government is able to cultivate strong control over the Internet use of its citizens. Women with limited technological exposure and experience may appreciate the additional security of this model. However, this approach can only be maintained through the use of fear, which in the long run, is not sustainable; the government cannot ensure the complete protection of citizens online. The government cannot warn of imminent “cyber-disaster” indefinitely; to do so will eventually lead to greater and greater distrust of the government, and ultimately discontent. Given that ICT policy is inherently written with the future in mind, to adopt a Cybersecurity-dominant policy is to set oneself up for failure.

Conversely, adopting an Internet Freedom-based ICT approach may also have negative effects on Internet usage in the short and long term. Weak penalties for wrongdoers and limited monitoring may allow “bad apples” to pollute the digital space prior to mass adoption. Given that the Internet is an unfamiliar platform for many in Uganda, rumours of malcontents in cyberspace may deter first-time users from engaging with the medium in a significant way.

However, once sufficiently exposed to the benefits of the technology, users may prefer an Internet Freedom based approach. On the micro level, it allows individuals to speak their minds without fear of persecution, leading to a healthy exchange of ideas and opinions. Women, who so often have their voices suppressed in the real world, may appreciate the chance to be anonymous: to have their opinions heard without the filter of gender roles and stereotypes. As individuals use the Internet to innovate and solve problems, it inevitably benefits the community at large-- from the family, to the village, all the way up to the state.

Cybersecurity-based and Internet Freedom-based approaches each have distinct advantages and disadvantages. Policies that err on the side of security have a greater potential to entice citizens to adopt the Internet and feel safe, but if security is too extensive, it may lead to distrust of the government. Policies that err on the side of freedom may unintentionally attract those who will seek to do harm, but ultimately promote development and collaboration for all citizens. Neither approach is complete if it is enacted alone. By using elements of both the Cybersecurity-based approach and the Internet Freedom-based approach, Uganda can develop a balanced ICT policy, which both protects and empowers its citizens.

ACHIEVING A GENDER-SENSITIVE ICT POLICY

A balanced approach maximizes the strengths of Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom approaches, while minimizing the weaknesses inherent in the extremes of both models. Tools from both approaches are integral to the balanced model, but no tool is used to the exclusion of a potential benefit.

Take, for instance, the strategy of government monitoring, from the Cybersecurity-based approach. If every move that citizens make online is monitored, it will deter usage, but if nothing is monitored, it will tacitly encourage criminal behaviour. Monitoring must be done strategically if it is to be effective. The government could pay special attention to websites where financial transactions occur, for instance, in order to reduce fraud and theft. The government could potentially also monitor the Internet for slurs and threats of violence, to ensure that all users-- women in particular-- feel like the Internet is a safe and inclusive space. By making the public aware of specific, targeted monitoring measures in place, the government can promote the trustworthiness of the Internet, while also deterring potential cyber-criminals from taking advantage of the system. If the government discloses the nature of the monitoring (ie., in business transactions, on sensitive political matters, etc.) the transparency would additionally encourage trust between Internet users and the government. It would prove that, thanks to the efforts of the government, the Internet is not a lawless place-- but the government is not constantly looking over your shoulder, either. In other words, Cybersecurity in a balanced approach is based on the principle of caution, not fear.

An Internet Freedom-based approach has the positive effect of encouraging collective dialogue among Internet users. One of the main reasons that the Internet is such an effective platform for discussion is anonymity-- because no one can see the user or hear their voice, no one can dismiss their opinion on the basis of prejudice.

In everyday life, women's voices are far too often drowned out by sexism, gender roles, and pre-conceived expectations of gender. Online all opinions are equal, whether a man or a woman types them: one only sees the message, not the speaker. Ideas are judged on their merit and nothing else. Anonymity is integral to Internet Freedom, but it is a double-edged sword. Anyone can claim an identity online, but their online persona may not be a reflection of reality. If Internet Freedom is to be used to the benefit of the people, the government must educate its citizens about the benefits of being able to see ideas without judging the people who uttered them-- but should also remind them not to believe everything they read. Again, the operative word to describe the balanced approach is caution.



It is at this point of balance-- when people know that they can use the Internet freely and openly, but still have the necessary protection from its potential dangers-- that people are most willing to use the Internet, and most able to benefit from it. When conditions are at the optimal balance of free and safe, Internet use becomes most popular mode for communication. This has the ripple effect of promoting development, innovation, and ultimately, a contented population. In this harmonious freedom/security condition, trust for the government is at its highest. The user base of citizens is grateful for the opportunity to speak their minds, but also reassured by the knowledge that the government is looking out for them online. For the individual and the state alike, a balanced approach is the smartest approach

Unlike the maximalist utopias/dystopias mentioned earlier, the balanced model is most optimal and also the most practical. Under deft government management, the balanced ICT policy is also the most sustainable policy to maintain. Furthermore, it considers that women benefit uniquely from both the benefits of Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom.

Maintaining tight monitoring and control of citizen Internet use is difficult and expensive. It requires massive investment of professionals to develop and maintain filters; still more money is required to ensure constant monitoring. What's more, the meta-narrative of fear and disaster cannot be maintained indefinitely, especially if the threatened "cyber-disaster" never arrives. As more and more citizens adopt the Internet, a Cybersecurity approach becomes increasingly costly and cumbersome. Long-term, it is simply untenable. But it is worth noting that freedom isn't free either. While scammers and hackers will always be in the minority of Internet users, if they are allowed to establish a foothold in cyber-space, they will be able to do immeasurable damage. If rumours and reports of cyber-crime flourish in public discourse, first-time users and returning users alike will begin to doubt the viability of the Internet as a safe place.

A successful ICT policy will be one that stresses balance above all else: monitoring within reasonable, justifiable limits; anonymity, but taken with a grain of salt; empowerment, tempered with caution. Balance is not a single approach, a specific policy or a single tool. It has the potential to vary and be adjusted, depending on context. An ICT policy may err on the side of Cybersecurity in one regard and Internet Freedom in another.

Figure 5: A Gender-Sensitive Balance



By directly addressing and combating barriers women and men face, accessing ICTs, gender sensitive ICT policy development can act as a key tool in bridging the engendered digital divide prevalent in developing countries like Uganda.

Recognizing the differing effects of ICT policies on women and men, strategies can be implemented that cater to gender specific needs within particular areas, in this case women in Uganda. Gender sensitive strategies include human resources capacity building with the aim of “improving the skill levels and knowledge of women (in ICTs) so that they are better able to access the labour market.” Access and use of safe and open ICTs play key roles in empowering modern women, from increased employability to job creation to accessing health care and education. Policymaking becomes a fundamental platform for recognizing the often forgotten, yet inextricable, relationship that women and ICT have. An example is the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy approved by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Council. This policy offers ICT recommendations from a gendered perspective, focusing on the importance of inclusivity of marginalized groups in accessing and using ICTs in achieving autonomy and empowerment. The strategies outlined in this policy aim to “increase access to, and use of, ICTs in order to promote development and reduce poverty.”

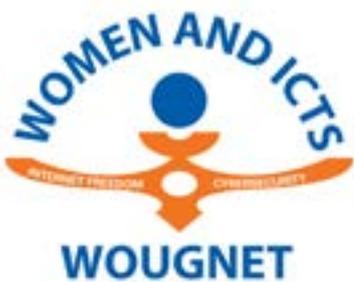
Conclusion: ICT Policy Is A Women's Issue, Too

As Uganda moves towards more prosperity, the role that ICTs play will continue to increase in importance. A balanced ICT policy is required and women must be involved as key stakeholders in this process.

By considering which policies 'weigh' the scale in each direction we can better measure and judge if policy is balanced or imbalanced. For example, introducing censorship adds weight to the side of Cybersecurity. Reducing legislative barriers on access and utilization of ICTs and ICT based services adds to Internet Freedom.

Women are empowered by Internet Freedom to be entrepreneurial, read useful information, and speak freely by engaging in discussion forums under a veil of anonymity. At the same time, the risk in society of violence against women or stalking transfers to cyberspace – thus requiring Cybersecurity measures as protection. Recognizing women as key stakeholders in balancing Cybersecurity and Internet Freedom, this policy brief serves to help frame the Ugandan ICT policy development. The balancing scale serves as a tool for policymakers to build ICT policy based upon a balance of these two extremes in order to both empower and to protect Ugandan women.

Figure 6: A Gender Sensitive Balance





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