WORLD WIDE WEB
FOUNDATION

Offline and Silent: New Report Shines Light onto Reality of Women's Internet Use in Developing Countries

Women 50% less likely than men to access the Web in poor urban areas of the developing world, and 30-50% less likely to use the Internet to increase their income or participate in public life, finds [Web Foundation report](#).

21 October 2015 – New research by the Web Foundation, established by Web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee, shows that the dramatic spread of mobile phones is not enough to get women online, or to achieve empowerment of women through technology. The study, based on a survey of thousands of poor urban men and women across nine developing countries*, found that while nearly all women and men own a mobile mobile phone, **women are still nearly 50% less likely to access the Internet than men in the same communities, with Internet use reported by just 37% of women surveyed (vs 59% of men).** Once online, **across countries across countries women are 30-50% less likely than men to use the Internet to increase their income or participate in public life**.

Women identify a perceived lack of know-how and high costs as the two primary barriers keeping them offline. Women are 1.6 times more likely than men to report lack of skills as a barrier to Internet use, while one gigabyte of data costs as much as 76% of monthly poverty line incomes in the countries in the study.

According to the study, women's access to education is a strong determinant of Internet use. Controlling for other variables, urban poor women with at least some secondary education were six times more likely to be online than urban poor women with lower levels of schooling. Cities with the highest gender gaps in education level such as Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda), Maputo (Mozambique), and Jakarta (Indonesia) were also the ones with the highest gender gaps in Internet access, while the gender gap in Internet access has closed in the cities where women's educational attainment outstripped that of men (New Delhi, India and Manila, Philippines).

Maintaining existing family and neighbourhood ties through social media is the main Internet activity for urban poor women, with **97% of male and female Internet users surveyed using social media.** *"Informal networks are a vital social insurance mechanism for the poor and ICTs have become an indispensable tool for strengthening these relationships,"* said Ingrid Brudvig, author of the study. *"However, there is a real risk that online social networks simply recreate the inequalities that poor women face in their offline lives, rather than helping them to open up*

new horizons, and policymakers must take steps to ensure the Internet becomes a truly empowering force."

Only a small minority of women Internet users surveyed are tapping into technology's full empowering potential by seeking out information, expressing views on important issues, or looking for economic opportunities online, the study found. Controlling for other variables, women are 25% less likely to use the Internet for job-seeking than men, and 52% less likely than men to express controversial views online.

However, the research also identified a group of women digital trailblazers. Women who are active in offline community life are three times more likely than others to speak out online on important issues, controlling for education, age and income. Women with secondary education or better are almost four times more likely than others to use the Internet for economic advancement and information seeking.

Findings on education and civic engagement show that women who already have some status and power in their community are far more likely to use the Internet to improve their position further, the report argues. *"To achieve the UN global goal on women's empowerment through ICTs, the key challenge is how technology can assist those without status or power to claim it,"* said Brudvig.

The study also examined the prevalence of ICT-mediated harassment and abuse, and calls on governments and online service providers to take appropriate action against it. Young people were most likely to have suffered harassment online, with over six in 10 poor urban poor urban women and men aged 18 – 24 who use the Internet saying they had suffered online abuse.

"Most poor urban women are confined to an ICT ghetto that does little to help them break out of the real ghetto of poverty and gender discrimination," added Anne Jellema, Web Foundation CEO. *"Governments need to make digital skills the right of every girl and boy as part of a wider commitment to quality education for all, move faster to bring costs down and develop strategies that explicitly aim to increase women's civic, political and economic power through technology."*

"This report shows that the situation is even more challenging than expected. Looking at the inequalities in access and use, the cross-country analysis gives us a more nuanced understanding of the gender gap. This is a call to action urging us to intensify our work together to achieve gender equality in ICT for development. Sida is ready – are you?" – Marie Ottosson, Assistant Director General, International Organisations and Policy Support, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

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Media enquiries: press@webfoundation.org

Notes to editors:

About the Web Foundation

Established by the inventor of the Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the World Wide Web Foundation seeks to establish the open Web as a global public good and a basic right, creating a world where everyone, everywhere can use the Web to communicate, collaborate and innovate freely. Represented by more than a dozen nationalities working from hubs in London, Washington DC and Cape Town, the World Wide Web Foundation operates at the confluence of technology and human rights, targeting three key areas: Access, Voice and Participation.

About the report

*The survey was conducted by Ipsos MORI in ten countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Philippines, Uganda.

The survey was conducted in the capital cities or main economic hubs including: Nairobi, Kampala, Yaoundé, Maputo, Lagos, Greater Cairo, Bogota, Jakarta, New Delhi and Manila.

A quota sample of 1,000 face-to-face interviews was completed with 250 men and 750 women aged 18-60 living in poor, urban areas. Fieldwork was completed over a four-week period between 11 May and 8 June 2015 with the exception of Egypt where fieldwork took place between 10 and 28 August 2015. Quotas were set by age and city region, proportional to the best available population data. The focus was on women, hence the larger sample of women. Inclusion of a small sample of men is useful for comparative purposes and to provide indication of the gender gap in ICT and Internet use in each city.

The global report launched on 21st October will include all countries except Egypt, which will be published at a later date.

In addition to our 10-country survey research, Women's Rights Online country partner organisations designed and conducted qualitative research which included key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and issue-based case studies. Among other purposes, the qualitative research was intended to:

      a) compliment the survey data through narrative and ethnographic techniques,
      b) delve deeper into specific topics identified as priorities by country partners,
      c) lend greater personal insight into the priority policy issues for women's rights online.

A full list of partners is available on our website, and you can download more information on the methodology here.

About Sida

This project was undertaken with support from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Sida is a government agency working on behalf of the Swedish parliament and government, with the mission to reduce poverty in the world. Through our work and in cooperation with others, we contribute to implementing Sweden's Policy for Global Development.