Asia Report on the Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) Testing

[Report Prepared by: Cheekay Cinco (GEM Regional Coordinator for Asia)]

Background

The Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) Testing Process in Asia was participated in by a diverse set of initiatives from a variety of countries.From the Multi-purpose Community Telecentre in the Philippines, which aimed to provide basic access to remote areas in the country, to the multi-media web-based project in Australia, the GEM Testing Process tried to cover as much of the spectrum of the ICT scenario/s in the region. The deliberate attempt to partner with a range of initiatives aimed towards reflecting the overall ICT inequalities and diversities in Asia Pacific.

GEM Testing Partners

The GEM Testing Partners in Asia Pacific were mostly organisations that the APCWNSP had encountered or worked with in the past. The initiatives were invited to participate in the testing process based on the type of project as well as in their geographical location. We had aimed to have the most equal sub-regional representation in the testing process. Of the organisations invited to participate in the evaluation, nine expressed an interest in gender evaluation and were able to participate in the regional GEM Workshop held in Manila in Septmember 2002. Of the nine organisations that participated in the workshop, only six were able to complete the testing process:

Name of Organisation / Initiative: Mothers4Mothers
Country: Malaysia

The Mothers for Mothers network, formed in 1998, is a network of mothers from multi-ethnic communities and ages, involved in women-connecting-women activities, promoting the concept of working from home. For the GEM testing, M4M looked into the situation of the M4M Virtual Team members (staff) and the M4M network members, aiming to probe into the barriers that women encounter in teleworking towards proposing recommendations to the Malaysian governments on the pre-requisites for promoting working from home on a national scale.

Name of Organisation / Initiative: Community Communications Online (c2o) / Web Origami Kit (WOK)
Country: Australia

Community Communications Online (c2o) is an Australian-based applications service provider that targets local activist and civil society groups. One of the main services they provide is a web content management tool called Web Origami Kit (WOK), which allows for collaborative web-based multimedia projects. In particular, c2o tested and implemented an evaluation plan based on GEM on a project called d3, a prototype interactive story-telling engine that runs through the Melbourne Central Business District, gathering images and stories. D3 is currently being managed by the Australian Centre for the Moving Images, with c2o providing creative and technical support for the project. c2o used GEM in project evaluation, particularly looking into how gender, race and age affected the formal and informal roles the various project team members played for the duration of the development of the project. They also used GEM to guide them in developing a user-assessment of the D3 project. c2o aims to use the tools that they have developed through the GEM testing in all their other software development project assessment as well as to propose a guide for other software developers in ensuring that gender, race and age issues are taken into account in project development and implementation.

Name of Organisation / Initiative: Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR)
Country: Sri Lanka

The Centre for Women's Research is one of the main women's organisations in Sri Lanka promoting the use of ICTs for women's networking. Through the GEM testing, they aimed to assess their Internet-based women's network of researchers and activists, and to look into how the network members have benefitted from the network and the use of ICTs. The main goal of their evaluation is to use the results for the expansion of the project that will take into account how women and women's groups in Sri Lanka can maximise the use of ICTs.

Name of Organisation / Initiative: InfoCon / Distance Education Project
Country: Mongolia

InfoCon is a private company that supports ICT for development initiatives in Mongolia. One of their main projects is the Distance Education Project (DEP) which aims to make online training on various basic subjects (i.e., Math, English, Basic ICT courses, Mongolian Grammar, and Gender Education courses) available to teachers and students in rural communities in Mongolia. InfoCon developed web-based training modules that will enhance education programmes in rural Mongolia. For th GEM testing, Infocon looked into two levels of project implementation: the gender roles played by the DEP team members, and how women and men beneficiaries used the training modules. InfoCon intends to use the results of the evaluation for further project planning.

Name of Organisation / Initiative: Women's Electronic Network Training (WENT)
Country: Regional

The Asian Women's Electronic Network Training (WENT) workshop is an annual regional activity held in Seoul, Korea that aims to equip women from civil society organisations in the region ICT skills necessary to use ICTs effectively and strategically. The main goal of the WENT evaluation is to assess if the training as it has been designed so far is really benefitting the women's movement in the region. An opportunity for a more creative evaluation for WENT came up when the organisers decided to hold WENT Awards in celebration of the 5th year anniversary of WENT. The WENT Awards presented a good opportunity for the organisers to get in touch with the trainees and find out what they have been up to since WENT and how the training has benefitted them and their organisations / initiatives.

Name of Initiative: Multipurpose Community Telecentres / Philippine Council for Health Research and Development
Country: Philippines

The Multi-purpose Community Telecentre (MCT) is a pilot project spearheaded by the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD), an agency of the Philippine Department of Science and Technology (DOST). The MCTs are being piloted in four sites in Southern Philippines. For the GEM evaluation, PCHRD decided to evaluate two MCT sites in Lanao: Taguitic and Malingao. The methods used for the evaluation included story-telling, interviews, logbooks and Focus Group Discussions.

The main reason given by the organisations that were not able to continue with the testing process was lack of funding and staff to implement the evaluation. However, in the case of IT for Change in India, which was running a community telecentre in Bangalore, they were unable to implement their evaluation plans because the community had decided that because the telecentre was in its initial phase, it was not yet ready for a gender evaluation. Definitely, the APCWNSP could have argued that it is precisely because the project was in its initial stages that gender evaluation could have been put into place. However, given that one of the cornerstones of the GEM philosophy was the importance of community involvement in the evaluation process, the issue was not further pursued.

Overall GEM Testing Process

Overall, the testing process ran from October 2002 to December 2003. The evaluation schedules and timelines of each Testing Partner varied according to the plans they had made based on their other organisational priorities.

GEM Workshop September 2002

The Asian GEM Workshop was the second regional workshop organised by APCWNSP for the GEM project. Prior the the Asian wokrshop, APCWNSP organised the Latin American GEM workshop in Mexico. The Asian workshop was held in Manila, Philippines from 15 - 19 September 2002. The workshop was participated in by members of the GEM Team, representatives from the nine GEM Testing Partners, resource persons and APCWNSP members in the region. The workshop aimed to:

- orient the participants on the current draft of the GEM Tool
- for the GEM Testing Partners to make initial evaluation plans for the GEM Testing phase

The Asia GEM Workshop consisted of presentations and group exercises that allowed the participants to familiarise themselves with the GEM Tool and the concepts of gender evaluation. Members of the GEM Team attended the workshop as facilitators and resource persons. At the end of the workshop, the testing partners had been able to develop initial evaluation plans for the testing process. The workshop was also an opportunity to plan how the GEM testing in the region would be implemented on a regional level.

Development of Evaluation Plans and Methodologies

After the regional workshop, the nine testing partners set out to finalise their evaluation plans with their organisations and communities. Each of the testers came up with plans and schedules particular to their organisational agreements and requirements. The support provided by the GEM Team varied according to the stated needs of the testers. Some of the testers required visits from the Asian Regional Coordinator to fine-tune and finalise the plans -- as was the case with InfoCon in Mongolia, the Multi-purpose Community Telecentre initiative and the Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA) in the Philippines. For FMA, in particular,in preparation for the development of their evaluation plans, they had organised a gender sensitivity training and asked GEM Team members to hold a half-day workshop on gender and ICT issues. The Regional Coordinator's visit to Mongolia was precisely to discuss the GEM testing and to finalise the evaluation plans and methodologies. At the end of the visit, InfoCon had been able to agree on their plans as well as develop the questionairre for the evaluation.

For the rest of the testers, online support was provided to finalise their evaluation plans and methodologies. This involved a series of emails sent between the Regional Coordinator and the Testing Partner representatives to discuss the evaluation approach, indicators and methodologies.

Implementation of Plans

As with the development and finalisation of the testers' evaluation plans, the implementation of the evaluation was also varied among the testers. Implementation included data gathering activities as well as data analysis. Some of the testers required the participation of the GEM Team in implementing their evaluation plans. In the case of M4M in Malaysia, the Regional Coordinator scheduled a two-week visit to Malaysia to hold Focus Group Discussions and interviews with members of the network. For the MCT project in the Philippines, a visit to the MCT sites were organised for GEM Team members could hold FGDs for the communities. The GEM Team also participated in the final workshop held for the MCT GEM which was organised for the various stakeholders to discuss and analyse the results of the data gathering.

Gender and ICT Issues Covered by the Testing Partners

Overall, the GEM testing in Asia looked into several gender and ICT issues, ranging from women as beneficiaries and women as creators of ICTs. The focus of the different evaluation plans that were developed for Asia were all unique and the issues that they raised were all specific to the context of their projects. But the common thread among all the projects testing GEM in Asia is that they all, in essence, ask these basic questions:

How are women using ICTs? What are the barriers they encounter? What are the benefits they reap from ICTs? How are these different from the use, barriers and benefits gained of the men?

From these questions, significant and more meaningful issues were raised. These include:

ICTs and Traditional Gender Roles

How do traditional gender roled affect how women and men benefit from and use ICTs?
Do ICTs really challenge established gender roles? If so, how? If not, why?

In order to respond to these questions, there was a need to probe deeper into roles assigned to men and women in the family, in the workplace and in the community. Beyond that, there was a need to make connections on how these traditional gender roles affect how women and men use ICTs and therefore benefit from them.

The M4M evaluation highlighted how traditional gender roles affect how women benefit from ICTs. The major goal of M4M is to enable women to work from home through the use of ICTs. However, this raises a few questions about whether or not women working from home through ICTs is truly empowering for women. On one level, it is empowering for women because working from home enables them to earn an income and a bit of economic independence. However, does working from home truly change gender roles in the family? Based on the conclusions drawn from the M4M evaluation, the answer seems to be negative:

"The most apparent feedback from the study seemed to point to unquestionable and utmost priority for women: primary roles for women as caregiver for her family and the responsibilities of raising children. Based on these pre-requisite conditions set inadvertently by the society, women have conformed and accepted it as a way of life. To enable women to cope with the multiple roles, there seems to be a general consensus among teleworkers surveyed that teleworking could be a solution for women as it can fuse family and career together - "best of both worlds". The flexibility of managing time to suit family and work is essentially the essence of teleworking."

On the other hand, however, the evaluation results also pointed out that due to the employment opportunities presented by teleworking for women, the respondents had expressed an increase in self-esteem and confidence.

"From the study, it was found that generally teleworking improves women's lives because it:

i) Increased confidence and level of happiness as teleworkers, not only, have expanded their interest outside family life but they can contribute positively to society and augment family's income;

   Most female teleworkers have worked outside home before marriage and they gave up career to provide for their family and then, take on work after the children have grown up. Teleworking provides opportunities to keep abreast with developments outside family lives and at the same time, get paid for their work. This is important for self-reliance and women's emancipation.

ii) Improved ICT skills as they can troubleshoot minor computer problems on their own:
iii) Increased potential to build bigger business. Teleworking is viewed as a platform to start-off their business;
vi) Allows better time management, as they do not have to deal with traffic or office politics;
v) Provides an avenue for foreign wives to work;"

The MCT Evaluation, however, presented another layer to the interplay between traditional gender roles and ICTs. Based on the statistical results of the telecentre usage, more women in the two communities participated in the MCTs as clients and volunteer staff. Further probing through the interviews and FGDs provided explanations for this unexpected result.

"In March, more females visited the MCT, mostly students and teachers. According to Ms. Teresita Payumo, female students are more studious compared to male students. Also, Mr. Lagula said that most of the teachers who visited the MCT are female, since teaching is traditionally considered as a job for women. Mr. Rasonabe added that in general, male users are not keen in writing logbooks."

In the other community, the reason cited for women's more active use of the telecentre was that the men in the community were busy on the farm. In both communities, it was apparent that the traditional roles that the women played provided them an oportunity to participate in the telecentre initiative more than the men.

Similarities can be drawn from the M4M and MCT evaluations. For one, based on the results, it seems that traditional gender roles and stereotypes actually work in favour of the women in the context of ICT use. In the case of M4M, the traditional role of the woman as a homemaker and mother proves as a viable justification for promoting teleworking for women. For the MCT initiative, existing gender stereotypes and division of labour in the communities facilitated their use of the telecentre.

Another similarity is that in both evaluations, the female respondents expressed an increase in their self-esteem as a result of their acquisition of ICT skills through their hands-on engagement with the technology.

However, it might be too early to fully tell if the apparent benefits that women are gaining from ICTs in these two cases would last. For the MCTs, the project is largely in its initial stages – with the communities only beginning to realise the value and potentials of the telecentres. Even in its early stages, the evaluation already yielded results that point towards the creation of new heirarchies in the communities based on who runs, manages and participate more in the MCTs. Should this heirarchical shift continue in the community, the chances of the men wanting more access to the telecentre are very high. When that happens, it is highly possible that traditional gender roles would not benefit the women in the community. For M4M, teleworking can reinforce traditional gender roles for women in the family.

Gender Roles in ICT Development

Another area that some of the testers focused on was the roles that women and men play in ICT projects and development. Basically, they looked into the roles and tasks in various ICT-based projects and what roles were played by female and male project team members. In the c2o evaluation, beyond looking at the formal roles and tasks each of the project team members had, they also looked into the ad hoc tasks that the members took on. Another aspect that was evaluated by both c2o and Infocon were how men and women in the project teams participated in decision-making.

ICTs and Women's Movements

Another specific area that the regional testing looked into is the use of ICTs among women's

organisations. The big question here is two-pronged: on one level, it asks how women's movements in Asia are benefitting from the use of ICTs; on another level, the question raised is how ICTs are changing the women's movements in the region.

Methodologies Used by the GEM Testing Partners in Asia

The GEM Testing Partners employed a range of methodologies for their evaluations from more traditional questionnaires to an award-giving initiative as a data-gathering tool. One thing the testers had in common in designing their methodologies was to ensure that they would use methodologies or combinations of methodologies that would yield both qualitative and quantitative data.

M4M, for instance, combined an online survey of its members with face-to-face FGDs and interviews. All of the methods that they used aimed towards fully understanding the lives of women working from home.

The WENT initiative used the opportunity presented by the WENT Awards initiative to gather qualitative data on the impact of the training on women's personal lives. In addition to this, the WENT evaluation also looked into existing documents, particularly the evaluation forms the participants filled out at the end of each training, to gather information on the topics that were most useful to the trainees in order to have further insight on what future ICT training initiatives in the region should offer.

The MCT project in the Philippines used several methodologies for the evaluation. These included telecentre logbooks, interviews, storytelling and journaling. It was apparent in the MCT evaluation that qualitative and quantitative data-gathering methodologies were equally valuable. The quantitative data (statistics) gathered by the logbooks was made more meaningful and understandable by the qualitative data provided by the interviews, storytelling and journalling.

Name of Testing Partner	Methodology/ies Used
Mothers4mothers	Survey form distributed to the network members
	Interviews with M4M staff
	Focus Group Discussion with network members
WENT	Stories and testimonials from the WENT Awards
	Questionnaire to be distributed to the organisations that have sent participants to WENT
	Analysis of post-training evaluation forms
C2o	Usability survey
	Online survey for the project team
InfoCon	Project Team Questionnaire
	Beneficiaries' Survey
MCT	Telecentre Logbooks
	MCT Staff Journals
	Interviews with and storytelling of community members
	FGD with community
CENWOR	Survey among network members

Conclusions and Recommendations: The Value of the Asian GEM Testing Experience

Practical Lessons Learned in Using GEM

Valuable lessons in gender evaluation of ICT initiatives were gained from the Asian GEM Testing process. Overall, the Asian GEM Testing process was a challenging exercise rife with administrative and conceptual issues. One on hand, the testers had to deal with practical concerns in evaluation such as funding and staffing. Implementing an evaluation plan, data gathering, data processing and analysis required logistical and administrative support from both the testing partners and APCWNSP. On the other hand, there were conceptual issues that had to be dealt with as well. One of the challenges in finalising the testers' evaluation plans was coming to terms and agreement regarding gender issues and concepts. In the period when the testers were drafting and finalising their evaluation plans, questions about gender and ICT issues were raised. In some cases, there was difficulty in defining whether or not an aspect of the initiative was a gender issue or not.

The main challenge that needed to be resolved was how to balance the practical limitations of time, human resource and finance with the need to have qualitative and participatory gender evaluations. This challenge was not made easier by the fact that, like most civil society groups, most of the GEM Testing Partners were under-staffed and under-resourced. This meant, as far the GEM Testing went, that while the testers could have delved deeper into the gender issues to come up with more substantive gender and ICT results, they had to limit their evaluations to what was achievable given their timelines, workloads and financial status.

In the current version of the GEM Tool, there is no worksheet that would guide the users in dealing with the practical ramifications of conducting a gender evaluation. The flow, according to the tool, is that after the finalising the evaluation plan and designing the methodologies, gathering of data and analysis of results would immediately (and naturally) follow. Based on the Asian GEM Testing experience, this workflow did not happen as easily as that. Throughout the entire process, the testers had to deal with practical and administrative issues. There is a need to develop a way through which GEM users can attend to these practical issues without sacrifing the evaluation's substance and quality.

The simpliest way to address this issue is to add two more worksheets to the GEM Tool that should be accomplished before finalising the evaluation plans:

1. Identifying Your Evaluation Requirements
Goal:
To create a checklist of the requirements to conduct the evaluation
To draft a budget for the evaluation

Guide Questions / Activities:
What resources would you need to implement the current evaluation plan?
Which resources are already available in the organisation? How will you acquire the resources that you need to fully implement the evaluation?

2. Developing a Timeline for the Evaluation
Goal:
To draft a working schedule for the evaluation

Guide Questions / Activities:
Identify the priority evaluation activities.

Identify which evaluation activities can be implemented given the organisation's available resources
When and how will you implement the evaluation activities that your organisation currently has no resources to achieve?

Resources Gathered from the Asia GEM Testing

Over the course of the GEM Testing process, a collection of valuable resources were gathered for other initiatives intending to conduct a gender evaluation of their ICT initiatives. One of the earliest comments on the GEM Tool from the different Testing Partners have been how difficult it had been to use – especially for those who have very limited experience with gender evaluations. In the final report of c2o, they write:
"There were several challenges and difficulties encountered in using GEM in the testing process. The GEM concepts were not easily understood. The website did not provide information in useful and clear formats. It was considered cumbersome and wordy."

The lessons learned from the Asia GEM Testing will be used in improving the GEM Tool. The experience of the GEM Testing Partners would make very good examples of how the tool has worked for different types of initiatives.

Gender and ICT Indicators

One of the more challenging phases in drafting the evaluation plans was developing gender and ICT indicators. Most of the testing partners struggled with this part of the evaluation for various reasons. Still, this was an integral part of the GEM process and the indicators developed by the testing partners will serve to be good models for future users of the GEM Tool. For instance, the indicators set by the WENT-GEM would be valuable to other ICT training initiatives that focus on social movements; the indicators developed by the MCT initiative would be useful to other rural telecentres; and those developed by c2o and InfoCon would be relevant to evaluation initiatives that aim to look into gender roles in ICT project development.

Gender and ICT Evaluation Tools

Another result of the testing process was the development of a collection of various gender and ICT evaluation tools for different types of projects and initiatives. c2o points out the need for such tools in their final report:
"Considering that many users of GEM would not be professional social researchers, GEM could helpfully provide a protocol that includes suggestions for questionnaire design, sampling and administration."

By gathering the tools that the Testing Partners have developed, the GEM Tool will be enhanced with sample methodologies that would make it easier for other initiatives to use GEM in the future.

Gender and ICT Evaluation Practitioners

Perhaps the most important resource that has resulted from the GEM Testing experience is the people, the representatives from the GEM Testing Partners, who have had first-hand experience in using the GEM Tool.