

Social Media Week Panel Agrees: More Women Need More Access

Posted by [Eva Harder](#) [1] on February 21, 2013

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[Social Media Week](#) [2]'s panel on [Women, Tech and Democracy](#) [3] illustrated the different ways that media, specifically information and communication technologies (ICT's), are serving as tools for civic engagement among women in developing countries.

[The Women's Learning Partnership](#) [4] (WLP) launched its first course on blogging in Indonesia this week, demonstrating the global call for empowerment fostered by social media.

[State Department](#) [5] advisor [Wenchi Yu](#) [5], Women's Learning Partnership associate [Layla Moughari](#) [6], [Dalberg](#) [7] consultant [Angela Rastegar](#) [8], and [Susan Markham](#) [9] and [Katrin Verclas](#) [10] from the [National Democratic Institute](#) [11] (NDI) talked about the work their organizations are doing around the world to ensure women have access to the educational and economic resources afforded by ICT's, social networking and internet access.

Communicate More, Learn More, Thrive More

[Studies](#) [12] show that women use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter more than men, even though female voices remain underrepresented in traditional media. But Rastegar pointed out that women in developing countries continue to struggle for access. For instance, only eight percent of women in India can access the Internet, as illustrated by Dalberg's [Women and the Web](#) [13] report.

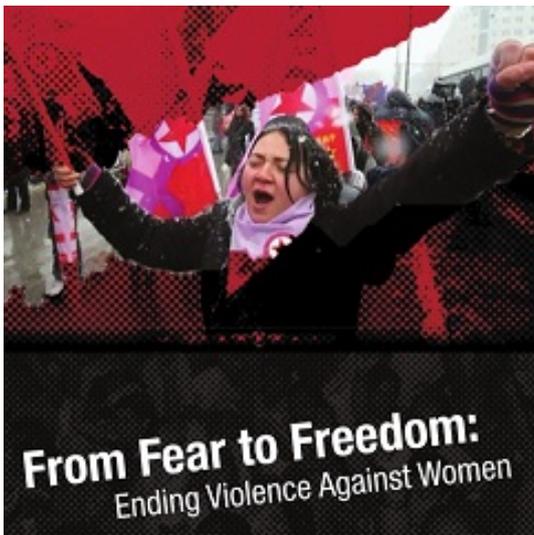
But why is this a problem?

According to Rastegar, accessing the Internet provides psychological and educational support for women. But it also does more than that for more than women. "Doubling women online in developing countries would have massive economic benefits."

Moughari also said that promoting ICT's and social networking for women has larger global implications. "While technology is by no means sufficient for a robust democracy, we can certainly enhance citizen, civic and political engagement."

Global Examples

Moughari played a short clip of WLP's documentary, ["From Fear to Freedom: Ending Violence Against Women"](#) [14], in which experts from around the world discuss gender-based violence and develop strategic ways to combat and prevent it.



Verclas illustrated how technology can enhance civil society with the mobile constituency communication tool NDI developed in Uganda, [UsSpeak](#) [15]. UsSpeak allows constituents to share their views with members of parliament via text message and voicemail, enabling citizens to be more directly involved with the political process.

But Verclas believes that more research needs to be done. She ended the panel's discussion with a call to academics, asking for more substantive studies on the use of ICT's for women's political participation.

"Communication is a deeply, deeply human thing," Verclas said.

Ultimately, gender development is always about human development.
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