Women and ICT in Tunisia
Results of a study

Tunisia is situated on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa and has just over 10 million inhabitants. It is a melting pot of several civilizations — Berber, Carthaginian, Roman, Byzantine and Arab — and is archeologically one of the richest countries in the world.

Despite having no natural resources, Tunisia is an emerging country which has achieved laudable economic ratings. Its success is founded on two major pillars, both presenting challenges — equality between men and women, and education for all.

With regard to women’s rights, the Code of Personal Status (women’s rights) was promulgated as soon as the country gained independence in 1956. The Code abolished polygamy, and Article 6 of the Tunisian Constitution enshrines the principle of equality of all citizens. Tunisia is a signatory to the Copenhagen Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In the field of education, the schooling rate is the same for girls and boys. Schooling is free of charge and compulsory. The obligation to attend school has been strengthened since 1991 by means of a law which penalizes withdrawal of children from the school curriculum, especially young girls.

Survey of women and ICT

Tunisia is pursuing a sustained policy of developing and promoting information and communication technologies (ICT). This is abundantly clear in the Xth and Xth development plans, in the national ICT strategy, and in the master plan of the Ministry of Communication Technologies. Because gender issues have been identified as a national strategy, calling for a comparative approach between men and women in all sectors, the Ministry of Communication Technologies took the initiative of conducting a
survey on “Women and ICT in Tunisia”. The study was carried out with the support of a loan from the World Bank for promotion of the ICT sector in Tunisia.

The objectives of the study were:
- to analyse the situation on the basis of indicators and existing data on women and ICT;
- to define, develop and select specific indicators for the project and determine methods for calculating or estimating them from existing data or from surveys, taking into account relevant international standards in this regard;
- to analyse data by gender, and study any disparities between men and women, between sectors of development, and between urban and rural populations, pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses of the situation analysed;
- to establish a database with measurable indicators on women and ICT;
- to work out a methodology for the establishment of a gender database.

The study was carried out in four regions, and the sample spans 11 governorates:
- Greater Tunis (the capital city), which comprises populations coming from various regions of the republic and displays a great diversity of social categories;
- the Governorates of Siliana and Kasserine, whose population is predominantly rural;
- the Governorates of Sfax and Sousse, which are both university and industrial poles;
- the Governorates of Gafsa and Medenine, which are located in the south of the country and which both include a region where the economy is dominated by a single industry.

The size of the sample was a population of 1500 people (aged 15 years or more) made up of 1200 women and 300 men. The sample of 300 men was selected as a control group, to enable the study to assess any gender-based disparities.

The sampling criteria used reflect the variables that have a major impact on women’s and men’s positioning in relation to ICT. These variables, which are cited in many previous studies carried out in different countries, are: age; level of education; and type of living environment (rural, urban or peri-urban).

Snapshot of the results of the survey

The sample as whole

**Mobile phones:** Four out of five Tunisians among the people polled possess a mobile phone (79.1 per cent). A third of the people who possess a mobile (31.2 per cent) state that they are not its sole user. Half of the people having a mobile phone say that they use it for both professional and personal purposes, while the other half use it solely for personal purposes. Average monthly mobile phone expenditure amounts to TND 30.4.

**Computer:** Among the sample population, 43.9 per cent state that they have a computer, while 46.4 per cent state that they use a computer. Of those using a computer, 75 per cent do so for personal purposes, while 48.9 per cent use it in their professional work. Asked where they use a computer, 28.4 per cent say they use it in the office or at work, 69 per cent at home and 22.6 per cent in an Internet café (“Publinet”).

Among people who have received training, 84.2 per cent followed their training in a formal and organized context (school, vocational training institute, university, private training institute) and 15.8 per cent in a non-organized or informal context.

**Internet:** In terms of Internet usage, 34.6 per cent of respondents state that they have used the Internet and know how to connect and browse. For those who have not used the Internet, the reasons for non-usage are, in order of frequency, lack of interest (57.8 per cent), lack of skills (“too complicated”) (16.6 per cent), lack of free time (10.6 per cent) and distance to the places where Internet access is available (8 per cent).
The most common points of connection are the home (48.5 per cent), an Internet café (47.1 per cent) and the office (21 per cent). Among Internet users, 87 per cent connect to the Internet for personal purposes, 55.2 per cent for professional purposes, 71.6 per cent for searches and documentation, 66.9 per cent for interpersonal communication, 41.7 per cent for group communication, 43.5 per cent for games and leisure, 30.4 per cent for media and news, 20 per cent to pay bills, 11.5 per cent for administrative transactions, and only 6.5 per cent for online shopping. According to the survey, 24 per cent of respondents have an e-mail address.

Comparing men and women

In terms of ownership of a mobile phone, the difference between men and women is not statistically significant, as shown in the charts. These charts also show the differences found between women and men in terms of computer ownership and use of Excel.

The study found that, in the office, women connect to the Internet less frequently than men (18.6 per cent as against 29.9 per cent). Men use the Internet more frequently for interpersonal communication and for obtaining administrative documents.

Factors affecting the use of ICT by women

Among the female respondents, 34 per cent know how to connect and browse the Internet; 34 per cent actually use the Internet; 57 per cent do not use the Internet because they do not see the benefit and 9 per cent because there is no place nearby where they can connect. Another finding is that 23 per cent connect at least once a month, 19 per at least once a week, and 26 per cent at least once a day.

Geographical environment: Fewer women own a mobile phone in rural areas than in urban areas. The use of mobile phones by women in rural areas is characterized by: personal rather than professional use; more difficulties using a mobile; more often shared with other people; and to a greater extent, usage is limited to calls.

### Comparing men and women

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mobile phone ownership</th>
<th>Monthly expenditure of communications (TND)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td>81.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>78.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td>37.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>28.5</td>
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*Around 98% prepaid.
Few women in rural or peri-urban areas own a computer or know how to use one. In peri-urban areas, women who use a computer rarely own it.

Women living in urban areas are more likely than those living in rural areas to know how to browse the Internet and actually do so. They connect more regularly and more frequently, and spend more time on the Internet. Almost all of the women who have an e-mail address live in urban areas.

**Educational level:** Unsurprisingly, the more highly trained the women are, the more they use ICT tools. Also, the younger the women, the more aware they are of the pitfalls of ICT.

**Professional status:** Teachers, women working in industry, and as domestic helps are those who make the greatest use of mobile phones for their professional activities. Women employed in administration and in the ICT sector are those most likely to own a computer and use it frequently in the office. The women least able to use a computer are those employed in agriculture and as domestic helps.

Profiles of women reflecting their relationship to ICT

The results of the survey make it possible to categorize women in terms of their relationship to ICT. The characteristics of the women and the proportion falling into each category are described below.

"Non-committed users" (52.38 per cent)

These are women who are less likely to have a mobile phone, spend less on calls, and for whom computers, the Internet or bank cards are quite likely to be unknown territory. More of the women in this category than in the other categories are illiterate or have received only primary education, are relatively old, are housewives or work in agriculture or in home-help, and live in a rural environment.

"Standard users" (13.50 per cent)

Almost all of these women own a mobile phone, use a computer, use Word and browse the Internet. They have generally received a secondary education and are single, and an above-average proportion of them are employed in administration or are seeking employment.

"Seasoned users" (20.58 per cent)

These are women who almost all use a mobile phone and a computer. A higher than average number of them have received formal or informal ICT training. They spend time browsing the Internet and around half of them have an e-mail address. A sizeable proportion of this category are young women, having received secondary or higher education, and 80 per cent of them come from an urban environment.

"Committed users" (13.33 per cent)

It is these women who devote the highest budget to the mobile phone. They all use a computer and almost all of them enjoy ready access to a computer, use the Internet, have an e-mail address, have received training in ICT, use more than one type of software and are active on the Internet. Almost all of this category of women live in urban areas. They are more highly educated than the women in the other categories and are relatively young. The proportion of schoolchildren and students is greater in this category than in the other categories.
Establishment of a database on women and ICT

The starting point for this study on women and ICT was the hypothesis that there may be a digital divide of some magnitude between women and men. Hence, the aim of the project was to propose actions to bridge any gaps found.

The results of the survey have shown that the digital divide exists more between different categories of women than between women and men. The discriminating factors between women are age, geographical environment and level of education.

It has therefore been decided to put in place a strategy for the establishment of a database to periodically measure progress made in bridging the divide between the different categories of women. Indicators have been identified for periodic assessment of the situation concerning women and ICT: process indicators to measure progress in actions undertaken; and outcome indicators to measure the actual reduction in disparities.

In order to exploit the database, it has been decided to analyse data in three dimensions: time (evolution of indicators through time); space (rural/urban environment, governorate, region); and cross-tabulation of the different variables according to needs. The data will be updated at least every three years.

The indicators selected will enable the country to measure the reduction in the gap between the different categories of women users of ICT: non-committed; standard; seasoned; and committed. The list of indicators has been incorporated into the database hosted by the Ministry of Communication Technologies, thereby ensuring that due account is taken of the gender dimension.

Lessons learned

This study has highlighted the reality of the gender-neutral environment in Tunisia in terms of women and ICT. The results of the survey show the high degree of impact of an environment which is conducive to ICT access without discrimination as to gender.

From a detailed analysis of the figures obtained from the survey, it may be concluded that there are no major differences between women and men in Tunisia in terms of ownership and use of various ICT tools. Also, the hypothesis of a digital divide between men and women has not been confirmed.

What emerges from the study above all is that a country that opts for inclusive education and gender equality in its laws and in its practices will enter the digital age more effectively. This is the case of Tunisia which, despite lacking in natural resources, has thrown its weight behind the development of human resources --- men and women alike. It is a satisfying observation that the economic impact of ICT on gross domestic product (GDP) in Tunisia has also been achieved through the positive role played by women in ICT.
Interview with Faïza Azzouz, Project Leader

How did the idea of conducting a study on women and ICT in Tunisia come into being?

A number of factors prompted this study:

- As a signatory to the Copenhagen Convention, Tunisia reports to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the status of women in all sectors of development, including ICT, in which regard it was decided to conduct a survey in order to have reliable statistics.
- Tunisia recognizes the importance of implementing the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which include a recommendation on reducing the digital divide between men and women.

Can the sample be deemed representative?

Yes. To the extent possible, we have sought to cover the entire territory by selecting different regions that are representative of the country from the geographical, economic and sociological standpoints. The male control group allowed for the gender comparison.

What do you think of the results?

The results show that we are not talking about miracles but about reaping what one sows. In other words, when a country sets its sights on education and on equality between men and women, it is sure to harvest the fruits of that policy. It is also clear that we must not neglect basic development in our pursuit of ICT. These technologies are not only consumer goods, but also the essential tools for development and, as the case may be, for catching up.

What do you see as the potential regional and international impact of the results of the study?

The study clearly demonstrates the value of making proper use of ICT while remaining firmly focused on basic development. It is my hope that, with the aid of regional and international organizations, it will be possible to launch an Africa-wide study of women and ICT in order to gain an accurate awareness of how things stand.

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This article was initially planned for publication in September 2010, and was updated in March-April 2011 for publication here as a case study on Women and ICT.

The results of the survey conducted by the Ministry of Communication Technologies were first presented on the occasion of National Tunisian Women’s Day (13 August 2009) in the presence of various organizations, including ITU, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Arab Information and Communication Technologies Organization (AICTO) and the National Council for ICT (France).