

Women Researching Women – Gateways to Technology-enabled Socio-economic Development

Objectives

An important agenda in the developmental discourse is the empowerment of women. Women are viewed as powerful vehicles of socio-economic development. They are gateways to the broader community – they serve as support structures for family units, and they disseminate knowledge and ideas across extended social units. They are financially and socially responsible, oftentimes taking on the role of a sole bread-winner in their families. Therefore, empowering women has profound ripple effects on the people, practices, and spaces surrounding them. The field of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICTD) specifically creates avenues to directly impact the society.

Last year's track on ICTD was very successful: it was well-attended, and more importantly, it provided interesting case studies that sparked audience interest in the field of technology for development. We hope to extend these rewarding experiences, this time presenting new studies by new researchers, with a focus on an area of the world in which ICTD research is especially prominent: India. One key unifying aspect of these studies is that they all recognize the utility of mobilizing social impact by conducting research with female user groups. Though we will focus on this common theme, we will also discuss how lessons learned in this session can be applied to other geographical and cultural contexts, and may even scale beyond female target populations.

Target Audience

This panel will target students early in their academic pursuits, such as undergraduates and Master's students interested in research, 1st and 2nd year doctoral students, as well as others that are interested in knowing more about the field of ICTD. We also believe that the panel will be of interest to researchers at any stage in their careers.

Panel Format

We expect our panel to be structured as follows:

Topic introduction – 5 minutes

The moderator will provide the motivation for the panel, introduce the panelists, and present an introduction to the themes that will be discussed in the panel.

Introductions of speakers – 10 minutes each (30 minutes in total)

Each speaker will introduce herself and present her research in ICTD.

Question and Answer session – 20 minutes in total

Here the moderator will take questions from the audience and address them to the appropriate speaker(s).

Wrap-up – 5 minutes

The moderator will highlight the key themes from the discussion and provide contact details of the panelists.

Session Length

This session will be one hour in length.

Overview

This panel will directly focus on women as *researchers* and women as *target populations*. Each of the speakers has directly interacted with women in urban and rural lower-income settings, working to address their needs through technology. Our areas of expertise include designing and developing mobile applications for female health workers in rural areas of the state of Orissa, information-sharing and communication technologies between women of two urban slums in Bangalore, and skill-building and training technologies for female domestic workers in Bangalore. These contexts and user populations, and our positions as female researchers, present unique opportunities for computer science applications. As female researchers, we enjoy smoother entry into the lives of our target population, and access to certain facets of their lives that are not typically exhibited. We will discuss the challenges and benefits of our unique positions and target populations.

Panelists

Ilda Ladeira, University of Cape Town, *speaker*

Nithya Sambasivan, University of California Irvine, *speaker*

Divya Ramachandran, University of California Berkeley, *speaker*

Julie S. Weber, University of Michigan, *moderator*

Panelist Backgrounds

Divya Ramachandran is a fifth year doctoral student in the Computer Science department and Berkeley Institute of Design at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research is in the field of Human-Computer Interaction, specifically in the area of using mobile, persuasive speech-based interaction for health information access and training in developing regions. She is advised by Professor John Canny. She has participated in and co-organized a number of workshops on ICTD, including one to be held at the ICTD conference this year. She finished her undergraduate degree in Computer Engineering at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. She is currently interning with the Technologies for Emerging Markets group at Microsoft Research India, conducting research on persuasive mobile health applications for pregnant women in Orissa.

Nithya Sambasivan is a second year doctoral student in Informatics at the University of California, Irvine. Her research interests are in Information and Communication Technologies for social and economic Development, from a Human-centered standpoint. She is particularly using low-cost audio, video, and mobile technologies. She has co-organized three workshops on ICT4D at the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI). She has a Master's degree in Human-computer Interaction at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and an undergraduate degree in Electronics and Communication Engineering at Anna University, Chennai, India. Her research experience includes summer research internships at Accenture Technology Labs, IBM T.J.Watson Center, and Nokia Research Center. She is currently a research intern at the Technologies for Emerging Markets group at Microsoft Research India, conducting socio-technical research on information practices in slum communities in Bangalore.

Ilda Ladeira is a fourth year doctoral student in the field of virtual storytelling at the Computer Science Department of the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She has conducted experience-centered research on the efficacy of virtual environments for preserving indigenous San storytelling. In her PhD she is using real-life storytelling ethnographies at the District Six Museum, Cape Town in order to design a storytelling system for preserving Apartheid-era stories. She holds a BSc. in Computer Science and Psychology and Masters in Computer Science from the University of Cape Town. Aside from storytelling research, she is committed to the promotion of Science education for women having participated in the ACM Women in Computer Graphics Tour of South Africa as a speaker, served as committee member of SAWISE (South African Women in Science and Engineering) and taught Computer Studies at a girls high school for two years. She has also worked for an ICTD NGO, Cell-Life, which provides technology solutions for HIV in South Africa. She is currently interning with the

Technologies for Emerging Markets group at Microsoft Research India, exploring the use of technology for training illiterate domestic workers in Bangalore. She is exploring low-cost training media as well as the benefits of storytelling-based, as opposed to instructional, training materials.

Julie S. Weber is a fifth year doctoral student in Computer Science at the University of Michigan. Her research interests are at the interface between Artificial Intelligence and Human-Computer Interaction, and her dissertation research explores user preferences for intelligent notification technology. She is also interested in Assistive Technology and Information and Communication Technologies for Development. She co-authored a book chapter on Assistive Technology and has recently co-organized a workshop on ICTD curricula at the ICTD '09 conference in Qatar. She has a Master's degree in Computer Science from Tufts University and received her undergraduate degree at Wellesley College, with relevant coursework at MIT and St Andrews University in Scotland. Her research experience includes internships at MIT Lincoln Laboratory, Google, and SRI International. She is currently a research intern at the Technologies for Emerging Markets group at Microsoft Research India, conducting research on user preferences for notification delivery in a large technical support center.

Note:

We kindly request our panel to be scheduled early in the conference, so there is room for questions, collaboration, and building relationships with students early in their research careers, throughout the term of the conference. If, like last year, there are other panels on ICTD, this should be included in a mini-track on the topic, if possible.