

Take Back the Tech- Part II: Contact: shikoh.gitau@gmail.com

A Feminist and Techie Dialogue on taking control of technology to end violence against women

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1. Back Ground

According to the United Nations (UN) special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Violence against women is the most common but least punished crime in the worldⁱ. It traverses every continent, country, and culture and the effects devastate women's lives as well as their families and the fabric of society as a whole. In the US, it is estimated that one in every four women will experience domestic based violence in her lifetime. In Uganda it is estimated that 57% of women are victims of domestic violence and 61%ⁱⁱ have been victims of sexual violence; while in the Democratic Republic of Congo and East Timor Rape, sexual slavery and sexual violence were used as weapons of war^{iii,iv}.

At the same time, technology has become intertwined with everyday life in many parts of the world. The UN estimates that by end of June 2010, five billion of the 6.8 billion people living on earth will have a mobile phone while the fastest adoption of mobile phone use is occurring in some of the world's poorest places. The Internet is increasingly becoming ubiquitous; according to the internet world statistics with users stand at just fewer than two billion^v and usage is set to rise with the introduction of mobile broadband^{vi}.

The impact of information communication technologies (ICTs) shapes our sense of spatial, temporal, and social relations with each other including relations across gender^{vii}. ICTs have become a tool in the way gender based violence is played out. For example, there has been an explosion in the creation, capture, and sharing of multimedia and personal information through the Internet, while privacy and security technologies are still based on economic models to protect financial identities. Social Networking Services (SNS) have the potential for discrete public monitoring while mobile phones can be tools for harassment, threats, and stalking. Yet, such technologies

can also be used to mitigate gender-based violence. For example, electronic monitoring systems are allowing violence prone areas to be easily identified and allowing for sexual predators to be screened from neighborhoods, SMS based alert systems can alert advocates to abuse, information sharing sites, and SNS based support groups, are all potential avenues where technology can support survivors of violence.

In addition to the challenges we face while engaging in the creation ICTs, there is also a need to expand the vision of the user to include women who are victims of violence and also those who might not have the privilege or knowledge to access technology in a safe manner. Further, there is a need to re-imagine how technologies could be used to combat violence and support survivors.

Violence against women is now recognized as a human rights issue but has mainly been addressed by women's rights activists, human rights defenders and some governments. However, with the inclusion of technology as both mitigator or extensor of its effects, it is important that the designers and creators of technology take part of this discussion.

This panel is both an informative and action-filled session to discuss and map out ways in which we, as women in technology in industry and academia can collaborate with women's rights activists and other stakeholders in the fight against gender based violence.

2. Overview

Take Back the Tech is a collaborative campaign, a community and a call to everyone - especially women and girls - to take control of technology to end violence against women. It draws the connections between VAW (Violence Against Women) and ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). The campaign takes place during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence (25 Nov - 10 Dec) but the platform is an animated and growing resource available 365 days a year. During the 16 days, each day sees a different action taking place from creating digital postcards, to blogging, to painting murals on walls to sending out SMS messages to raise awareness on gender-based violence.

Violence against women violates our most fundamental human rights. The campaign seeks to join the dots between violence against women and information and communication technologies as human rights issues. Take Back the Tech aims to create safe digital spaces that protect everyone's right to participate freely, without harassment or threat to safety; to realize women's rights to shape, define, participate, use and share knowledge, information and ICT; to address the intersection between communication rights and women's human rights, especially VAW, to recognize women's historical and critical participation and contribution to the development of ICT.

This campaign is organized by the Association of Progressive Communications, Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP). APC WNSP is a global network of more than 175 women in over 55 countries promoting gender equality in the design,

implementation, access and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and in the policy decisions and frameworks that regulate them.

3. Target Audience

The target audience for this panel is anyone who is interested in how technologies are both problematic and helpful in tackling violence against women. Specifically, creators, designers, and programmers of information and communication technologies (ICTs) will become aware of how particular technology designs are problematic. Further, this panel is also for policy makers and activists who are interested in issues that surround violence against women and technologies.

4. Panel Format

To accommodate an interactive process to discussing the topic at hand, the panel will be divided into two parts, a presentation component and design component.

4.1. Stories from the Field

This part of the panel is aimed at presenting experiences from the panelist on Violence against Women encountered as part of their work or research. It is aimed at painting the picture of VAW as drawn from the four continents where the panelists live and work.

4.1.1. Domestic Violence Survivors in the USA

Research in domestic violence marks “leaving” as a crucial act to break out of the cycle of domestic violence. However, with the ubiquity of information communication technologies (ICTs), it is not clear that physically leaving severs ties or abuse. Jill Dimond will present her research study on domestic violence survivors in the United States and their experiences with ICTs. Specifically, she will talk about how ICTs have been both problematic and helpful in the experiences of DV survivors.

4.1.2. An African Women’s Activist Perspective

Jan, will pick up the discussion from her previous talk on the same topic. She will address questions on ICTs and VAW including: *How do we approach technology as women’s rights activists? Where do communication rights fit into women’s movements? How can we reclaim technology for women’s empowerment?* She will also talk about the Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX), a campaign that was developed by the APC-W in response to calls from feminist and women’s rights movements for greater understanding of emerging technologies, their potential and impact on the rights and lives of women.

4.1.3. Subversive and Political lives of Female Domestic Workers in Urban India

Nithya Sambasivan will present her ethnographic work on female domestic workers in Bangalore, India. In addition to presenting the general landscape of domestic violence in sum settings, she will discuss the phenomenon of intermediation, which is the process of making use of technologies through third parties, among the women. She will highlight the subversive and political aspects of this process, and what it signifies for technology designers.

4.1.4. Networking Anganwadi Workers to End Violence

Breakthrough is developing a mobile internet platform to create a community of Anganwadi women (grassroots community workers) and to mobilize them to collectively organize to combat violence against women in their communities. We will describe the process of developing the platform, with emphasis on lessons learned for designing ICT solutions to addressing domestic violence at the community level.

4.1.5. Keeping Your Chats Just that

Sally will be talking about a campaign being run by WomensNet that is aimed at young women to address ICT based VAW. Young people are often faced with violent encounters in these environments – just like in real life. This campaign aims to empower young people from becoming victims of violence or harassment when they use the internet and cell phones. The aim is to help young people use these tools as ways to call for change to problems they face.

4.1.6. Lessons from the Human Development Report

Although not representing the UNDP; Jean-Yves draws from his experiences in cases outlined in the Human Development Report^{viii}. ICTs have tremendous potential for empowering people and helping them overcome communication barriers and limits on information sharing. But what happens when practices are in place that actively and purposefully limit and even obstruct the use of these technologies? Looking at women migrant Filipino workers in Gulf States, we see that through ICTs, these networks are able to extend support to women in need and protect them from continuing abuse.

4.2. The Exchange

Apart from the presentation, the other key component of this panel is to engage the audience in both a dialogue and exercise to start off a solution or parts of a solution to a problem that affects all of us. By the end of this part of the panel we hope to have come up with some technological ideas that can be implemented to combat VAW.

4.2.1. Discussions and Q&A

The panelist will engage the audience in a discussion on VAW and how women in technology can collaborate in research, design and sponsoring ways in which to mitigate this dehumanizing practice.

4.2.2. Discuss Potential Designs with GHC participants

Jill, Mary, Shikoh and Nithya will lead a brainstorm with the attendees of GHC10 on defining a part of the gender based violence problem that might be solved by social networking. This information to have students collaborates with women in Africa to research social computing technologies and gender based violence. The goal is to develop a software application for a social networking website that may help prevent gender based violence

5. Panelist Bio

Jan Moolman is a feminist editor, writer, trainer and activist with extensive experience in the Southern African women's and communication rights sector. She is a former editor of Agenda, South Africa's longest surviving feminist journal and was a columnist for Independent Newspapers.

Sally-Jean (or Sally) is Women'sNet's Executive Director. Her work in the gender sector started in 1991 with her involvement in the organization People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA).

Jill Dimond is a graduate student at Georgia Institute of Technology and is advised by Dr. Amy Bruckman. Her current research looks at domestic violence survivors and advocates, their experiences with technology, and designs to mitigate abuse.

Mary Hudachek-Buswell is an Assistant Professor at Clayton State University. She is the local chair of the 2010 GHC conference to be held in Atlanta. She is the founder and advisor to Clayton State's Wi2STEM (Women Interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) organization.

Nithya Sambasivan is a third year doctoral candidate in Informatics at the University of California, Irvine. Her research interests are in the technosocial aspects of low-income communities.

Jean-Yves Hamel is a cultural anthropologist specialized in information and communication technologies for development. Since January 2007, he works at the Human Development Report Office of the UNDP where he develops the online presence of the global report and conducts research on ICT4D.

Charlotte Lapsansky is a PhD candidate at University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication. Her research focuses on development communications and communication for social change programs, with an emphasis on gender equality.

Bindu Madhavi is a postgraduate in Sociology with ten years of experience in the development sector especially in education, policy issues, child and health. She has expertise in Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, Research, Training, Advocacy, and Counseling.

Shikoh Gitau is a PhD student at the University of Cape Town. Her research is on the use of mobile internet for social uplifting underprivileged communities especially women's.

NOTES:

- This session is related to *Take Back the Tech*, the technical talk by Jan Moolman. We request that it runs in the session after Jan's.
- We are also requesting for an extra 30 Minutes to accommodate both panel presentations as well as the action/design component of the panel.
- Two of our panelist might not be able to be present in person, but are willing to present via an online tool, we request for the provision of tele-conferencing facility.

References

ⁱ<http://www.iwtc.org/gnets/364.html>

ⁱⁱ<http://www.genderit.org/en/index.shtml?apc=a--e96273-1> (GenderIT has made available reports on VAW and ICT from various parts of the world)

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2009/0804/p17s01-woaf.html?page=2>

^{iv}<http://www.etan.org/et2006/january/28/30rape.htm>

^v<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

^{vi}<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/20/opinion/20sat4.html>

^{vii}http://www.genderit.org/resources/WOCTIS_paper_jk.pdf

^{viii}http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Complete.pdf