



The (Un)likelihood of Male Allies for Gender Equality in the ICT Sector and Governance

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Abstract

The ICT sector - shaping social media, artificial intelligence, and other digital technologies - plays a pivotal role in socio-political and economic development. At the intersection of gender and ICT, global commitments such as SDG 5 emphasise the importance of increasing women's participation in male-dominated domains, including ICT professions, leadership, and governance. While international organisations, governments, and corporations have launched initiatives such as Girls in ICT Day, The Girl Effect, and ICT bootcamps to support women and girls, campaigns like HeForShe and White Ribbon have sought to involve men and boys. However, critical ICT4D literature rarely examines men's awareness, interest, and agency in supporting gender equality in the ICT sector. This research addresses this gap by analysing qualitative data from male ICT professionals in government and business in both Global North and South contexts. It reflects on the (un)likelihood of men acting as genuine allies in challenging entrenched gender hierarchies. Using a feminist neo-Gramscian theoretical lens, the study interrogates gendered subjectivities and "common sense" assumptions that reproduce male dominance in socio-technical systems (Nordvall & Wieslander, 2019; Steans & Tepe, 2008). Findings suggest that while some men express support for gender equality, structural and ideological barriers persist. The study argues for the strategic implementation of transformative gender mainstreaming initiatives that engage men and boys across contexts to disrupt hegemonic masculinities and enhance inclusive governance in the ICT sector.

Keywords: male allies; hegemonic masculinity; ICT governance; gender mainstreaming; feminist theory