Implementing a gender audit of an online knowledge service: the experience of GDNet

By Cheryl Brown for GDNet

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Preface

The author was commissioned by GDNet to identify the potential barriers facing women in the use of online knowledge services and use these findings to design and carry out a gender audit of GDNet's online knowledge services including its database of researchers, papers and organisation profiles (the GDNet Knowledgebase), its community groups and blog. Based on the results of the audit, an action plan has been drawn up, in consultation with the GDNet team. This publication shares the findings of the desk-based research, details of the gender audit and GDNet's action plan.

Contact:
Cheryl Brown, marketinglady@btinternet.com

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About GDNet

GDNet is a Global Development Network (GDN) program which supports southern researchers to contribute and debate ideas in development thinking, policy and practice. GDNet is managed by the GDN Cairo Team in partnership with the Economic Research Forum (ERF) and works in collaboration with local and international organizations for much of its regional work.

GDNet is funded by:

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1. Background

GDNet is the knowledge service from GDN and supports southern researchers to contribute and debate ideas in development thinking, policy and practice. In 2012, GDNet launched the Connect South campaign to draw attention to the barriers experienced by southern researchers when trying to inform global debates on development with their knowledge, including accessing information and communicating their findings. In the Connect South Charter of Commitment, GDNet made a pledge to "addressing these barriers and creating an enabling environment for southern researchers to communicate their work better and more widely". Understanding the experience of its female members and identifying how it can support them better is a key part of this work.

This paper was written to support GDNet in delivering on its commitment by:

- identifying the potential barriers facing women in the use of online knowledge services,
- implementing a gender audit of the design and delivery of GDNet's online knowledge services including its database of researchers, papers and organisation profiles (the GDNet Knowledgebase), its community groups and blog
- recommending how GDNet can respond in the immediate and longer-term.

When the internal discussion document on which this paper is based was drafted, the author contacted other knowledge brokers and intermediaries in development, several of whom expressed interest in GDNet's findings. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex, for example, also recently reviewed its Knowledge Services to explore the extent to which gender equality is promoted across their work and their process and findings have informed the design of this audit. The discussion document for GDNet has therefore been updated and expanded in order to share GDNet's learning and ideas with a wider audience. The paper draws on GDNet's own survey data of its members, and a review of open access peer-reviewed and grey literature. The author experienced difficulty in sourcing recent open access research on aspects of the gender digital divide, particularly in relation to Asia and Latin America.

2. Existing gender indicators for GDNet

GDNet receives funding for its work from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) through its Research and Evidence Division. DFID has made strong commitments to gender equality and women's rights and gender is a cross-cutting objective for its research and projects, regardless of their thematic focus (DFID, 2008). For example, DFID advises all its research programme consortia (RPC) to address gender equality in their research communications and capacity building strategies (DFID, 2009). While the RPC guidance does not apply to research uptake and communications programs, such as GDNet, the program's logframe for the 2010-2014 funding period does require GDNet to disaggregate by gender certain data collected as part of its monitoring and evaluation:

- the level of use of southern research by male and female southern researchers;
- the level of use of GDNet research-oriented online services by male and female users;
- the level of satisfaction with GDNet research-oriented online services by male and female users;
- male and female researchers' confidence and ability to communicate their research (specifically participants of GDNet's research communication training workshops).

Collecting data and reporting on these indicators does present some challenges. GDNet does not currently require its members to state their gender when registering and visitors to the website do not have to log in to search and download material. Instead, the known ratio of male to female GDNet users is based on the self-reporting of respondents to GDNet's annual web survey of registered members, who can choose whether or not to declare their gender[i]. For the purpose of this paper, the web survey sample carries some biases: those with better internet access, time available to participate and significant commitment to GDNet will be more likely to respond.

In its early years, GDNet was hosted by the Institute of Development Studies in the UK where its data processing had to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and has continued to follow the principles of the Act since relocating to Egypt. For this reason it has not asked its members to state their gender when registering as under Principle Three of the Act, organisations may only collect the minimum amount of personal data necessary to fulfil its purpose[ii]. If GDNet were required to report to one of its donors on usage according to gender, the Act would allow for GDNet to introduce gender as a mandatory field in the registration process and GDNet could limit the use of the website to registered members who have to log in, in order to monitor who is using its online services. However this step would need to be weighed against the creation of additional barriers to use for people who may be reluctant to share personal data, or are put off by having to remember a login and password in order to access a website.

3. What GDNet's survey data says about use by men and women

The 2011 GDNet Members Survey suggests that 26% of GDNet's members (primarily research and teaching staff, the majority of whom are based in the South) are female[iii]. The overall findings of this survey are presented in GDNet's 2012 monitoring and evaluation report but closer analysis of the data shows that there are some differences between male and female users of GDNet's knowledge services. In terms of age, occupation and research interests, the responses are broadly similar, although there were no female respondents under the age of 20, while a handful of male respondents fell into that category. New members for 2011 were asked for their reasons for registering with GDNet, and the three most common were the same for men and women: to gain information on funding, data for their research and to access online journals. The differences become visible when the responses about use and satisfaction are examined.

When asked about their primary use of GDNet's online services, email newsletters were most popular among women (38% of female respondents) while the database of online papers in the GDNet Knowledgebase was the most popular choice for men (32% of male respondents). The difference between their preferences could be explained by how much time men and women typically have available to browse the internet: many writers make reference to the "double workload" commonly experienced by women worldwide (Commonwealth of Learning, 2001; Ahmad, 2010; Machirori, 2012) and the impact this has on women's use of ICTs is explored in Section 4. An email newsletter is a knowledge service that requires a small amount of initial activity on the subscriber's part; after subscribing, the newsletter is emailed periodically with no further effort required by the recipient, who can choose if and when to read it. Use of the GDNet Knowledgebase requires the user to visit the website each time, to browse and search,

etc. The implication of this information is that if a program is interested in increasing use among its female target audience, it could look to develop more tailored email newsletters.

This difference in preference for individual knowledge services, also helps to explain the data on frequency of use. Male GDNet members were nearly twice as likely to visit the GDNet website on a weekly basis than female members (20% of men compared to 11% of women) and were more likely to have updated their online profile more than once in the previous 12 months (27% compared to 18%).

Men were more likely than women to have their own research featured or uploaded on the GDNet website (32% compared to 24%). Respondents were given the opportunity to say why they had not uploaded their research and common responses among female users were lack of time, being unaware that this was possible, experiencing technical difficulties in doing so, not being clear of the benefit of putting the time in to do it, and their work not being in English. The data also suggests that male GDNet members are more likely to share research found on GDNet than female members. The survey asked GDNet members about how often they used GDNet's social media (feeds, Twitter, Community Groups and YouTube channel) and the responses show that women were more likely than men to have never used them at all. For example, 28% of female respondents use the GDNet YouTube channel, while for men the figure is 39%.

Box 1: Summary of key differences between male and female GDNet members identified through analysis of survey data

- About 1 in 4 GDNet members is female.
- The primary reason for using GDNet is email newsletters (women), online database of papers (men).
- Male GDNet members are nearly twice as likely to visit the GDNet website on a weekly basis than female members.
- Female GDNet members are less likely than male members to have used GDNet's social media products.
- Uploading of research onto GDNet and sharing research found on the site is more common among men than women within GDNet's membership.

Based on November 2011 survey of GDNet Members: 1165 respondents.

The GDNet survey data highlights that there seem to be some real differences in the way male and female members make use of its online services (see Box 1) and it would be interesting to carry out qualitative research among members to understand more about why this is the case.

The need to look beyond disaggregated data

On its own, the gender split among GDNet members of 26% female to 74% male, is of limited value if one cannot compare it to the ratio in the wider population of all potential GDNet members i.e. southern researchers and those interested in research from the South. While this information is not available, some related figures are, which could help GDNet see if the ratio of men to women among its members is about right for certain research interests and certain regions of the world. For example, survey data from 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa found that the overall proportion of female professional agricultural research and higher education staff was 24% in 2007/08, although this varies widely by individual country (Beintema and Marcantonio, 2009). GDNet survey data from respondents located in those same countries,

most of whom are based in research institutes or universities, has the overall proportion of women as 20% in 2011; slightly lower than the comparative ratio. The subset of responses is too small to make filtering down to research interest (agriculture) meaningful, however overall, agriculture was the 2nd most common research interest for men and 10th most common for women in the GDNet members survey. Although this is an imperfect benchmark, it does suggest that there may be value in GDNet investigating if anything can be changed in the design and implementation of its online knowledge services to encourage more women to register as members.

4. Gender-based barriers to using online knowledge services

How does gender affect research uptake? Before looking at use of online knowledge services, it is worth recognising the limitations of undertaking, and acting on the results of, a gender audit of these services, in terms of increasing research uptake. Use of online knowledge services is not enough in isolation: a person's ability to access research knowledge is part of a larger theory of change about how research contributes to poverty alleviation and social justice[iv]. Gender divides may be present in other stages in that process. For example, do female researchers have equal access to research capacity building activities[v]? Is the research carried out by women perceived as being as credible as that of male researchers? Do female researchers experience particular challenges in academic career progression? How easy is it for women to influence decision-making processes with the research they find through an online knowledge service? Answering these questions is beyond the scope of this audit, however, it is important for providers of online knowledge services to be aware that improvements to their services may have a limited impact if gender inequalities exist in other areas[vi].

For those working in online research communication, gaining a nuanced understanding of the experience of female researchers in the South is vital if uptake and knowledge-sharing is to be encouraged among this particular target audience. This next section of the paper reviews what is known about gender-based barriers to use of ICTs and online sources of information among users in the South. These barriers are then used to generate areas of investigation for GDNet's gender audit of its online knowledge services.

Access to ICTs

A review of the research on gender and ICTs in the South, shows that there is a clear gender digital divide. In West Africa, for example women were found to have 35 per cent fewer opportunities than men to benefit from the African information society (ENDA, 2005). This divide has several dimensions with access featuring heavily in the literature on ICT and gender, however gender analysis for ICTs needs to look beyond availability of technology and infrastructure (Narayanaswamy, 2011, Gurumurthy, 2004[vii]). For example, does having access to the internet lead to use? And what kind of use?

Access to the internet is changing rapidly in the South due to the penetration of mobile technology; in Africa now, according to Dorothy Okello, "more people have access to a mobile phone than to clean water, a bank account or electricity" (2012). But, there are still gender biases within this explosion in access. Okello cites data from Research ICT Africa which shows that in 11 out of 16 African countries studied, men and women (similar in terms of income, education and employment status) were equally likely to own a mobile phone but that

communication was less affordable for women than men. The survey also found that women had less knowledge of the internet and used it less, and fewer women had an email address. The World Development Report (World Bank, 2012) states that in low income countries a woman is 21% less likely to own a mobile phone than a man, and this rises to 37% in South Asia.

A study in Zimbabwe found that female students were not using the computer labs made available to them at the university. The main reasons given were that women wanted to avoid the aggression displayed by male students in getting to the front of the queue for computers, and had work and family obligations outside of their studies that made using the "first come, first served" policy for computer lab use difficult for them (Mbambo-Thata et al., 2009, cited by Diga, 2009). In looking at use of public venues for accessing the internet e.g. libraries and internet cafes, Gomez (2012) highlights the strong cultural barriers women in some Muslim and Hindu countries may face where it would not be socially acceptable for them to either be unaccompanied by a male in public, or to interact with a male public venue operator.

Attitude to ICTs

Data from 12 countries in Latin America was analysed to see what effect gender alone has on use of ICTs; testing the assumption that the gender digital divide is partly explained by women being technophobic (Hilbert, 2011) and less likely than men to want to use ICTs. In fact, the reverse was found to be true: "The overwhelming majority of the cases show that, when controlling for working and educational enrollment conditions, women make more use of digital ICT than men." (Hilbert, 2011, p.11). In the same study, data from 13 African countries was analysed, and the author found there was little difference between men and women who were on "equal footing" in terms of income, employment and literacy, and in terms of mobile phone use, this was likely to be greater among women. Hilbert's conclusion is that these findings show the potential for women to make more use of ICTs if given the same opportunities as men: "Traditional discrimination in the fields of employment, income and education turn the positive correlation between women and ICT into a negative one." (2011, p.20).

Information literacy

There are clearly other obstacles to use of online knowledge services beyond lack of access. There is an overlap here with discussions about knowledge in the research communication sector where it is recognised that providing access to knowledge (in any form) is not enough, and instead there is a need to consider and address barriers to uptake and use. For example, a key lesson learnt by the IDS-based Mobilising Knowledge for Development programme during its first phase of DFID funding was that "the process of mediating research information and creating spaces for debate is key for research uptake. Intermediaries need to stimulate demand for research and support the development of stakeholders' skills to search for, evaluate and use it." (Brown, Vogel & Wilson, 2010). GDNet is working with the British Library for Development Studies at IDS, to build these information literacy skills among its users through the development of training modules and materials. Although Hilbert (2011) argues that women are no less capable than men of using ICTs, and therefore in no greater need of information literacy training than men, the delivery of the training would need to take into account any specific needs and circumstances of women (e.g. timing of workshops) so that the capacity building benefits both genders equally.

Control of ICTs

A key issue explored by the Gender Evaluation Methodology toolkit for evaluating ICTs, produced by APC WNSP, is that of control of ICTs by women which may be determined by "gender discrimination in jobs and education, social class, illiteracy, geographic location (North or South, urban or rural), lack of access to financial resources and high costs of access." ENDA found that in West Africa, women have only a third of the opportunities of men in terms of control of ICTs (2005).

Availability of time

As seen above, the 'double-workload' experienced by many women who are responsible for caring for family members outside of any paid work hours, can reduce women's time to use any ICTs available to them. A consideration of this would need to inform the provision of ICT training, opening hours of computer labs and expectations over the kind of use that women might make of online knowledge services. For example, if online knowledge intermediaries want to encourage more female researchers to participate in online discussions and upload their research papers, there will need to be a clear incentive given time is likely to be a precious resource.

Content

The above barriers of access, control and availability of time, can create a further barrier or disincentive to women using online knowledge services: that of participation in contributing content (UNCTAD, 2011). GDNet's own 2011 survey data found that men were more likely than women to have uploaded research papers, or to have updated their researcher profiles and that lack of time or technical difficulties were contributing factors. Furthermore, the dominant languages of new ICTs e.g. English, Chinese, French and Japanese, can present a barrier to producing and using online information for the numerous women who do not understand these languages (APC WSNP). Low levels of content and contributions from women may affect how relevant an online information service is perceived to be to women who visit it, and could also dissuade them from contributing content themselves, thus creating a vicious circle where the majority of contributions are made by men.

Privacy and security online

Privacy, security and freedom of expression will also need to be factors in gender analysis of ICTs (APC WNSP, Narayanaswamy 2011). Earlier in this section, mention was made of the cultural barriers that prevent some women from physically accessing ICTs, however these may also impact their virtual access. Online communities, discussion boards, etc. are often provided to facilitate discussion and network building among researchers, but are they safe spaces for women? Are there reasons why some women may feel unable to participate in discussion, uncomfortable uploading a profile photograph[viii], or making their contact details available online? ENDA's study of the digital divide in West Africa found that some men are threatened by the use of mobile phones or the internet by their partners (2005).

5. What are suitable questions to include in a gender audit for online knowledge services?

In addition to the above set of barriers, a useful framework for developing a gender audit for knowledge services is the set of four indicators proposed by ENDA to measure the gender digital divide: control, content, capacities and connectivity (2005).[ix] In combination, these capture the issues highlighted in the above discussion, if privacy, security and freedom of expression are included as components of accessibility. In summary, these indicators are:

Control: this considers the role women play in decision-making and advising on ICTs, the extent to which gender is a concern in ICT policies, and how active civil society organisations are in promoting gender equality in ICT.

Content: this relates to the type of content used by different types of women, what content is produced for and by women, and in response to which needs.

Capacities: what is the level of information literacy among women and is gender-sensitive training available? Is it offered at times and in ways that enable women to access it?

Connectivity: The ENDA research found that the disparity over access was less significant for women with secondary and higher education, as one might expect, but as an indicator, they propose considering the issue of accessibility as part of connectivity. Connectivity is therefore a composite of access (is the technology available to women?) and accessibility (are there issues for women in accessing this technology when available?)

Another source for developing audit questions is the DFID Gender Manual which presents criteria for assessing projects that have some focus on gender equality or women's empowerment. For example: "specific means have been designed to help **overcome identified barriers** to women's full participation in the activity" (2008, p.22) and "Activities should seek to ensure women and men are involved in decision-making" (2008, p. 23)

Table 1 in Section 6, below, presents the questions used by GDNet to audit its online information services. A gender audit is typically carried out through self-assessment and this audit was implemented by the author, who works for GDNet in the capacity of Outreach and Engagement Consultant with input from the GDNet team. Some of the questions can be used as a checklist during planning, while others serve as indicators and can be used annually to help GDNet track its progress, for example the ratio of male to female survey respondents, compared to the ratio of male to female members of GDNet.

6. Results of GDNet's gender audit of its online knowledge services

Table 1: Gender audit of GDNet's online knowledge services: October 2012
Control
Q: To what extent are female members of the target audiences or women's organisations consulted during decision-making around GDNet's online services?
In the past, GDNet has drawn on the results of surveys sent to all of its members, to inform its strategic decisions around its online services. As part of this study it has started to disaggregate survey findings by gender to identify any issues that affect female members in particular.
Q: Does GDNet's usability testing include female users?
Feedback on the usability of GDNet's website currently comes via its web-based survey and direct communication to team members.
Q: Does GDNet's member eligibility policy consider gender?
The Membership Acceptance Procedures does not explicitly mention gender, however it does have as one of its values being as inclusive as possible. To produce a Researcher Profile, researchers have to fill out an online form with minimal required fields: First and Last Name, Nationality, Country of Residence and Email. Researchers also have to give the name of their host organization. Gender is not included as field in the profile form.
Q: Are women sufficiently represented in GDNet's evaluation activities (surveys, interviews, etc.)? i.e. is the ratio of men to women among respondents equal to the ratio of the population (GDNet members)?
The ratio of men to women among GDNet members is only known through the annual web-based survey, which as mentioned earlier does bring with it certain biases. However, if the ratio from the survey is taken as a reasonable proxy (roughly 1 in 4 members are women), then women are sufficiently represented in GDNet's evaluation activity of identifying cases of knowledge into use (2 out of 8 were female). A sample of researchers who have had communications training from GDNet are interviewed 3 months after the workshop to assess the impact of the training. Gender is not explicitly included as one of the sampling criteria.
Content
Q: Does the gender breakdown of researchers who upload content onto GDNet match the ratio of male to female researchers registered with GDNet?
This information is not currently available but would require GDNet to analyse a sample of the latest research uploaded (screening out multiple contributions by a single researcher) and compare this to either the proxy ratio from the survey (1 woman to 3 men) or to the ratio obtained from the analysis of a sample of Researcher Profiles.
Q: Does GDNet's editorial criteria consider gender?
GDNet's editorial policy does not specifically refer to gender, however it does encourage a

diversity of views. Documents do not need to be in English, provided an English summary and set of keywords are provided, and GDNet will digitise documents that are not currently hosted online; these approaches may make it easier for some female researchers to contribute papers.
Q: How many women are contributing to GDNet's social media: participating in online community groups, commenting on blog posts, etc.?
The survey data suggests that women are less likely than men to use GDNet's social media. While GDNet's blog at www.gdnetblog.org allows comments, the identity of the person commenting is not always clear. As part of its Connect South campaign, launched in 2012, a LinkedIn Group was created with discussions taking place among members of the group. Although in its early stages, at least 50% of the Group's 122 members are women (where this is identifiable) and 4 out of 9 discussions have been started by women (excluding those started by GDNet staff).
Q: How does GDNet ensure that its female target audience's needs for content are captured?
This is not carried out in a formal manner yet although the opportunity exists to capture this in the future through the annual survey to GDNet members. In 2011, GDNet introduced Thematic Windows as a means of enabling users to browse the Knowledgebase according to subject rather than just region, and Gender was selected as one of the 22 themes.
Q: How does GDNet ensure that male and female researchers and their work are given equal visibility on GDNet's Thematic Windows and in its email newsletters?
GDNet's editorial policy states that research is more likely to be showcased e.g. featured in an email newsletter, if it comes from an active GDNet member (regularly updates their profile, submits content, etc). This could put female researchers at a disadvantage as the 2011 survey found that men were more likely than women to upload research or update their profiles. In practice, however, the GDNet editorial team considers the representation of female researchers when selecting which new researchers and papers to highlight alongside other criteria.
Capacities:
Q: Is GDNet's information literacy training gender sensitive? (are women involved in its design and testing? Is it made available in appropriate ways to female researchers in the South?)
GDNet is currently working with the British Library for Development Studies to develop online training modules and workshops to build capacity in information literacy so the opportunity exists for the findings of this study to inform the design and testing.
Q: Is there a need for GDNet to provide additional support for its female users to help them use their services e.g. upload research, search the website, evaluate sources of information, etc.?
The survey data suggests that there are barriers to use that are preventing some female members of GDNet from using its services including lack of time and experiencing technical difficulties. If the services could be made easier and quicker to use, then this could lead to increased use by female members of GDNet.

Connectivity:
Q: Does use of GDNet's services match the expected level of use among female southern researchers relative to male southern researchers?
Suitable comparative data was unavailable at the time of the study.
Q: Are female southern researchers consulted about privacy and security concerns: e.g. inclusion of contact details and photographs on the online researcher profiles, or closed vs. open discussion groups?
These questions have not been asked previously, however there is the opportunity to include questions on these areas in the GDNet Members survey and to carry out focus groups to uncover any issues.
Q: Does GDNet ensure men and women benefit equally from its services, by responding to the access barriers often experienced by women: e.g. lack of time, ability to use only in the workplace or in the home?
Thematic Windows were introduced in late 2011 as a means of responding to the lack of time that some members experience. The windows help users to browse the contents of the GDNet Knowledgebase through 22 themes. The level of use of and satisfaction with these services will be assessed in the 2012 GDNet Members survey and the results can be disaggregated by gender to see what the uptake is among women.
Program Management
Q: Are resources (staff time and budget) specifically allocated to supporting women to make more use of GDNet's online knowledge services?
At the time of writing, resources were not explicitly allocated for this purpose beyond the implementation of this study.
Q: Are gender-sensitive indicators included within GDNet's monitoring and evaluation?
The logframe for the current phase of the GDNet program was updated in 2012 and the indicators now make reference to male and female southern researchers, thus requiring data on use of and satisfaction with GDNet's services to be disaggregated by gender.
Q: Is GDNet's monitoring and evaluation designed to enable men and women to express their views?
GDNet's monitoring and evaluation framework and activities are designed and implemented in partnership with consultants from ITAD. Good practice in gender-sensitive data collection includes using male and female data collectors, who have received gender sensitivity training, and complementing quantitative data collection with qualitative methods (World Bank, 2001). Both of these are reflected in GDNet's data collection although it is not known if gender sensitive training has been carried out.
Q: Are GDNet's partners committed to gender equality?
This information is difficult to obtain from a search of external sources, such as partner websites, however GDNet's partner in the MENA region, for example, (Economic Research Forum) strives to maintain gender balance on its Board of Trustees, and its South Asia partner is hosted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies which has gender and empowerment as a focus of its research.

7. Conclusions and action plan

This baseline audit shows that GDNet is already making gender a consideration within the design and implementation of its knowledge services and achieving a good level of use among female members of its target audience. For example, the annual GDNet members survey indicates that the ratio of men to women among its southern users (75:25) is in fact slightly better than that of those in the North (78:22). However the audit's findings have also supported GDNet to identify areas where it can make some changes to help increase the use of its services by women in the South and the uptake of research from female southern researchers. For example, the survey results suggest that female members are unaware that their work does not need to be in English in order to be featured in the GDNet Knowledgebase; something GDNet can remedy through direct communication with its members.

As a result of this audit, the program has produced the following action plan:

- Include a gender dimension in all research undertaken for GDNet to see if there are any gender implications. For example, GDNet is studying the use of southern research and the challenges facing southern researchers drawing on secondary sources and GDNet's survey data and this will include analysis and reporting through a gender lens.
- Undertake further research to estimate the ratio of men to women among GDNet's target audiences to use as a benchmark for comparing the gender ratio among a sample of GDNet Researcher Profiles, use of its online services, etc.
- Formalise the internal editorial practice of considering gender balance when selecting researchers and papers to feature on the Thematic Windows, Regional Windows and email newsletters.
- Encourage team members to put additional efforts into identifying research from female researchers when sourcing material for the GDNet Knowledgebase.
- Establish an annual review of the latest researcher profiles and research papers added to the GDNet Knowledgebase to monitor the gender profile.
- Explore the introduction of additional email newsletters as these seem to be a preferred means of accessing knowledge for GDNet's female members.
- Review the profile updating and research submission processes to make them easier and quicker to use, and improve communication to members about them, including the value of investing time in using them.
- Include gender in the sampling approach for any qualitative evaluation and research to ensure the ratio of men to women matches that of the population; currently this would mean 25% of the sample would be women.
- Monitor the contributions made in GDNet's online community groups, LinkedIn discussions and Twitter accounts and support female members to participate more if this is identified as a need.
- Include a question in the annual GDNet Members survey to identify the content needs of men and women.
- Make gender balance a consideration when recording video interviews with researchers or commissioning guest blog posts.
- Look for opportunities to gain feedback from female researchers on their privacy needs in relation to Researcher Profiles and online community participation.
- Ensure men and women are represented in the design, testing and decision-making around GDNet's Knowledge Services and information literacy training.

- Check that monitoring and evaluation activities are gender-sensitive by following good practice e.g. using male and female data collectors and a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Although the literature on gender and ICTs tends to focus on access or the role of ICTs might play in closing gender divides, in recent years research has emerged that is highly relevant for those interested in increasing research uptake through online knowledge services. The evidence and arguments suggest that GDNet is right to take a broader view of gender than the current measures it is using if it wants to increase use of its online services among female researchers, and use of southern female researchers' knowledge. Gender may not be the only issue[x] but there does seem to be significant value in regularly evaluating the GDNet programme to ensure everything possible is done to facilitate greater use of its services by women.

From the author's discussions with others in the research communication sector while producing this paper and gathering data for the GDNet web 2.0 study[xi], there appears to be growing interest in exploring how to mainstream gender into online research communication and brokering. It is recommended therefore that any further work GDNet does in this area be documented and its learning shared with the sector. GDNet can also benefit from keeping in contact with other knowledge programs that are looking at their work through a gender lens. IDS, for example, has produced a 24 point action plan (Birchall, Batchelor and Hayes, 2012) in response to its gender review and its experience in implementing this plan could be helpful for GDNet.

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[i] Interestingly, in the 2011 survey, only 14 respondents opted not to state their gender, however as this was the first question in the survey, it may have affected the likelihood of responding.

[ii] See the ICO guide to the Data Protection Act for more details of the Eight Principles http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/the_guide.aspx

[iii] Based on the survey data, there is a minor difference in gender distribution between GDNet members located in the North and South. In the North, the membership is 78% male, 22% female, while in the South it is 75% male, 25% female.

[iv] The author is grateful to Dr. Isabel Vogel for her comments on how this gender audit should be considered within a broader Theory of Change.

[v] GDNet also works to increase research communication capacity through workshops and online toolkits, although these activities are beyond the scope of this audit.

[vi] The Theory of Change that underpins GDNet's strategy for 2010 to 2014 is within GDNet's strategy note, available at http://cloud2.gdnet.org/cms.php?id=gdnet

[vii] The Overview Report by A. Gurumurthy in the BRIDGE Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and ICTs, September 2004, is an introduction to these issues.

[viii] A brief scan in February 2011 of researcher profiles on GDNet for example found that of the first forty profiles of researchers in Ghana, the only researchers to upload a photograph (five) were men. This is too small a sample to be meaningful and it is not always clear from names which researcher profiles are male or female, but might be an area for further investigation.

[ix] ICTs in this study were narrowed down to computers, the internet and mobile phones.

[x] Narayanaswamy for example, suggests that class is an overlooked issue in research communication to the South and that resolving these inequalities will take more than translation of more content, or the creation of more accessible websites. See Narayanaswamy, L., 2010, 'Gender, Power and the Knowledge-for-Development Agenda'. Doctoral thesis, Durham University. http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/530/

[xi] See: Brown, C. (2011) *Are southern academics virtually connected? A review of the adoption of web 2.0 tools for research collaboration by development researchers in the South*.