SRHR and ICTs: A Policy Review and Case Study from South Africa

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Introduction:

- South Africa has impressive legal provisions for SRHR
- Yet there are very high levels of adolescent pregnancy;
- They experience unequal gender relations, poor access to health services, and lack knowledge on SRHRs
- Poverty and place of residence also severely affect women’s experiences of SRHRs
- There is massive excitement about the potential for ICTs to provide solutions
Core Questions:

- Who are the core actors advocating for ICT inclusion, and what are the key framings around SRH; ICTs and the peri-urban?

- How aware are South African policy makers and other stakeholders of the peri-urban as a place which shapes the SRH of women and girls?

- What processes of policy change are occurring?
Methods:

- Literature review
- Policy review: 8 policies pertaining to SRHRs/MCH and ICTs
- 20 key stakeholder interviews
- Ethical approval from the African Gender Institute, UCT
- Engaging with policy makers through social media
Policy Review

- SA has a highly progressive policy and legislative environment
- Significant policy reform in both health and ICTs
- Challenges include fragmented systems, ‘interoperability’, and poor implementation
- Rapid technology change and innovation has led to technological convergence
Health Policies:
- National Strategic Plan on HIV, STIs & TB 2012-2016
- Integrated School Health Policy 2012
- National Contraceptive & Fertility Planning Policy & Service Delivery Guidelines 2013
- National Contraception Clinical Guidelines

ICT Policies:
- National e-Health Strategy 2012-2017
- South African Connect Broadband Strategy
- mHealth Strategy and Implementation Plan
SRH Policies

- Identify the complex challenges confronting South Africa
- Focus on SRHRs in relation to HIV prevention activities
- Offer a mechanistic approach to SRHRs, with little sex positive work
- Avoid contentious SRHRs issues, through emphasising MCH or devolved responsibility
- On occasion, use ICTs, on occasion, for extending participation
- But, little recognition of adolescents’ vulnerability and no reference to m-Health or the use of ICTs.
ICT-Related Policies

- Identify generic categories of vulnerable or marginalised people
- Address MCH, but not gender relations in relation to health, or women’s and girls’ differential access to health or SRHRs.
- Recognise disparities between rural and urban contexts, but do not identify peri-urban contexts as needing attention
- See technology as offering new means to overcome the challenges of rural health system delivery.
ICTs and SRHR in Practice in South Africa

- ‘Hot new area’
- Online spaces promote SRHRs, offer women protection from sexual violence and become spaces of sexual predation.
- policy is made ‘on the hoof’

**MomConnect:** bold new national government initiative

- ‘One million women get messaging services’
- Emphasises women’s roles in motherhood
- Address MCH, improve mothers’ knowledge and update of health services, identify risk factors and electronic pregnancy register
ICTs and SRHR in Practice in South Africa

Youth Africa Live: online social networking through mobile phones

- ‘Sex, love and relationships in the time of HIV’
- Explicitly addresses adolescents’ SRH knowledge requirements
- Safe space to ask questions anonymously
- Extremely popular with young people
- But: the site needs to be constantly monitored
New Synergies

- **Cell-life**: online support for contraception and abortion using SMS messaging
- **Soul City**: television drama with radio and social media links MCH to SRHRs
- On-line engagement has encouraged policy makers to ask about contraception and abortion and think about how to develop content
- Closer collaboration between the Depts of Health and Social Development.
Challenges and Contestations:

- Framing the content of ICT initiatives: technical expertise vs medical expertise; political and funding conflicts
- Strong involvement of the private sector: corporate social responsibility vs value-chain?
- Technical vs political solutions: health system reform and place
- Unanswered ethical questions
- Avoidance of politicised topics in favour of mothers and Apple-I.