



STRATEGY COUNCIL MEETING

2 September, 2009

GENDER SOLUTION SALON

Moderator: *Ms. Gloria Bonder, Regional UNESCO Chair on Women, Science & Technology in Latin America, Chair, International Taskforce on Women & ICT – ITF*

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION TOPIC

Women and men's equal rights, equal opportunities, equal access to social, economic and cultural goods and equal participation in decision making in all spheres of private and public life, are foundations to an inclusive and democratic society, and key factors for achieving a sustainable human development.

This overarching statement has been incorporated in global treaties and institutions, governmental policies, and impulse a wide range of actions of women's organizations.

It's time to integrate it into the emerging social, economic, and cultural paradigm promoted by the global dissemination of ICT.

Information and knowledge society are rapidly expanding and changing all aspects of our life

However "women are at risk of becoming increasingly marginalized in the Knowledge Society, where much more than access to and use of information technology is at stake...they need access not only to new technologies but also to education, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, as well as the ability to participate fully in knowledge-based activities"¹

To address and reverse this situation, concrete and systemic actions and interventions are required to help them become active and informed citizens and creative builders of a gender sensitive knowledge society, which in turn will bring the greatest benefit to their countries.

¹ Huyer, S and Hafkin, N (2007) " Engendering the Knowledge Society. Measuring Women's Participation" ORBICOM

Just as education, appropriation of ICT needs to be seen as a basic capability, promoting and strengthening women's rights and citizenship.

The overall goal is to mainstream gender equity principles and gender analysis in all dimensions of the IS/KS : data collection, research, training, and education, content creation, IT design, governance, policies and programs at all levels.

That requires political will, adequate financial resources, human capabilities and a genuine collaborative management of sustainable plans and programs.

The current financial crisis has shown the need for public investments in core infrastructural areas. It has been shown time and again that whenever economic conditions worsen, women are first in line to bear the brunt. As online access becomes a lifeline to various kinds of opportunity, many governments in their response to the financial crisis have gone for large amounts of public investment in basic digital infrastructure, both to ensure equity in this crucial area, and to kick start economic growth. It is important that policies and programs with this goal adopt a 'gender and citizenship' framework as an important plank in our efforts towards empowering women to take a leading role in the development of their societies.

Questions for the discussion:

1. What specific contributions need to be done by international organizations, governments (IT ministries, women machineries, education, rural development, health and finance ministries, and statistic institutions); civil society and the private sector, to contribute to empower women in and through ICT?
2. Which strategies need to be adopted to move forward from the “ just add women (or gender as a noun) and stir approach” to develop a framework and concrete actions that may transform explicit and implicit gender rules and values and reinforce gender equality in the core of all policies and programs?
3. Which actions should be plan and implemented to mainstream gender equality in youth, education, entrepreneurship, health and governance initiatives?
4. Instead of adopting a “just add women and stir” (Harding 1995) approach, can we develop a framework for research and action that will transform the institutions and systems of development?

Additional questions for this session are:

1. How can UNDESA-GAID contribute to promoting ICT innovations in order to empower women and include gender issues in its initiatives and programs?
2. What can participating organizations and entities contribute?
3. What are the complementing components in the programmes of participating organizations that can serve as the basis for collaborating partnerships?

MAIN IDEAS RESULTING FROM THE DEBATE

- Gender as a cross-cutting theme should be integrated in all GAID lines of action and all CoEs. This requires concrete actions.
- There is a need to “join forces among organizations working in gender and ICT and other players included in the development of the Information Society” to avoid duplication of efforts and advance from local experiences to regional and global projects.
- This should be done step by step, using local experiences as good examples to move forwards.
- Gender has to be understood as a social relation involving both women and men. However due to historical and political reasons the gender perspective has been mainly focus on empowering girls and women, but this approach is changing.
- It is important to address gender issues within a life time approach from childhood to adult life.
- Gender and ICT need to be framed within a citizenship, and development approach, taking into consideration local needs and resources.
- Not only there is a need to assure universal access for girls and women to ICT but promote its strategic use, and encourage them to be creators of local content, innovative knowledge and gender friendly technology.
- One line of action should be to encourage and support women in the technological industry. Support their career development and take advantage of their experience in decision making positions to act as role models of young women and influence policy makers.

PROPOSALS

- Regional and national centers working on gender and IS should be promoted and supported.
- Those centers might elaborate “umbrella” research and action programs based in collaborative and comparative projects with the participation of different countries and regions.
- GAID as a channel to influence public policies should advocate for gender equity in all events and debates.

- The group proposed that ITF should collect best practices as well as success stories of women and organizations working on women/gender and ICT in all regions and disseminate it widely.