

Recommendations for Gender Equality in Information & Communication Technologies

Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Equal Access of Women in ICT, held in Seoul, the Republic of Korea, 22-26 October, 2001

Recalling

- the purposes of ITU as laid down in Article 1 of its Constitution, which include promoting “the extension of the benefits of the new telecommunication technologies to all the world’s inhabitants”, and the responsibility of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector to facilitate and enhance telecommunications development by offering, organizing and coordinating technical cooperation activities, as confirmed in Plenipotentiary Conference Resolution 70 (Minneapolis, 1998) and Resolution 7 of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (Valletta, 1998), respectively;
- the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the ITU, UNDP and UNIFEM for the purpose of increasing women’s access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) among others;

Considering the following existing and/or emerging gender related issues in the policy, legal and regulatory areas, as well as, the technological and socio-economic aspects of ICT:

A. Policy, Legal and Regulatory:

- Lack of Government policies to address existing disparities between the genders in ICT;
- Extremely low number of women in positions of decision making in the ICT sectors;
- Low rates of access to ICT in underserved and rural areas, particularly by women

- Lack of policy and regulations to ensure universal and affordable access to ICT, particularly by rural women and the disabled
- Lack or absence of coordination within and between government agencies relating to gender issues in ICT;
- Absence of legal frameworks and/or government programs to ensure women's participation in ICT;
- Lack of policy emphasis on the under-privileged, especially women and women with disabilities;
- Few efforts to develop information on gender specific issues (e.g., gender desegregated statistics and case studies in ICT) necessary for policy and regulatory decisions;
- Widening gender digital divide in ICT; and
- Absence of gender sensitive laws in ICT - i.e., cyberlaws.

B. Technologies & Applications,

which can be applicable to women, *inter alia*:

- Lack of basic infrastructure that allows access to ICT products and services (e.g., basic telephony, power, hardware, software, etc.) especially in the developing countries;
- The low rate of computer literacy and pre-requisite skills for ICT use;
- Low participation of women in the development of ICT and technology applications, further preventing them from coping with the changes;
- Affordability of new technologies and applications;
- Availability and choice of appropriate technology relevant to specific geographical conditions; and
- Development of technology to prevent cyber crimes

C. Socio-economic Issues,

Which can be applicable to women, *inter alia*:

- Low literacy rates and awareness of ICT
- Low rate of access to ICT infrastructure and applications (e.g., multi-lingual software, business applications for women SMEs etc.), primarily due to extreme poverty in rural and remote areas as well as continuing uneven distribution of resources;
- Lack of evaluation mechanisms within gender and other development programs;
- Lack or absence of co-operation among women's groups concerning gender sensitive content development;
- Absence of media support for gender issues in ICT; and
- Growing cybercrimes, especially harmful contents (e.g., child pornography, trafficking etc.) in the ICT era.

Recommends that the World Telecommunications Development Conference, Istanbul, Turkey, March 20-29 2001 set guidelines as follows:

A. Policy, Legal and Regulatory Areas:

- Encourage Member States to develop Government Action Plans to promote gender equality in ICT;
- Review relevant policies and/or legislation to reflect a gender perspective and concerns, and if necessary, amend existing legislation or enact new legislation to reflect the gender dimension in the converged ICT environment;
- Encourage Member States to set up a unit of gender equality in the relevant government department(s) to work towards gender mainstreaming;
- Promote training opportunities for women (regardless of age, race, social class, disability) in all areas of ICT through various incentives such as scholarships and other financial support;
- Create awareness of ICT opportunities through effective use of the media;

- Encourage Member States and Sector Members to promote equal employment opportunities, promotion, and representation of women at decision making levels through transparent and fair job evaluation systems in ICT sectors;
- Develop guidelines to increase women's participation and employment in the ICT industry;
- Develop monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure effective implementation of gender programs in ICT;
- Develop appropriate cyberlaws that address gender concerns;
- Establish telecommunications development funds to finance projects to improve access to ICTs, specifically to women and underserved groups in rural and remote areas or communities.

B. Technologies & Applications Areas,

- Promote the use of ICT and its applications with affordable access for women especially in developing countries;
- Facilitate access to ICT and its applications by developing financial and assistance packages for women;
- Encourage Member States to create open domain software tools and applications as well as knowledge base, to allow the development of gender sensitive contents.

C. Socio-economic Areas,

- Raise awareness at all levels, from policy-makers to grass-root level;
- Build partnerships among women's groups/academic people/women in science and technology;
- Utilize ICT as a tool for increasing literacy, improving basic education and consequently generating ICT content and literacy, as well as improving business opportunities for women;

- Train women, including disabled women, to enhance skills in ICT;
- Mobilize and ensure equitable distribution of resources to reduce the gender digital divide;
- Form partnerships among government, national and international agencies, NGOs, civil societies, and business houses;
- Promote a positive environment and social system (e.g., day-care centers, etc.) by government, corporate, NGOs and other gender related groups to enable women to participate in ICT-led industry and society.

Further recommends that the ITU Development Sector:

- Organize regular seminars on gender issues in ICT (e.g., Cybercrimes on women in the era of converged information and communication technologies in 2002 and annual regional training workshops on gender perspectives in ICT).
- Encourage Member States and Sector Members to increase and facilitate gender equality in such areas as:
 - ◆ ICT infrastructure development;
 - ◆ Expansion of various ICT applications (e.g., e-commerce, e-learning and tele-medicine etc.) especially in rural and remote areas of developing countries;
 - ◆ Assistance in identifying appropriate ICT relevant to specific geographical conditions and developing software applications to prevent cyber crimes;
 - ◆ Raise funds through closer cooperation with relevant governments, UN and other development fund agencies to narrow the gender gap in ICTs.