



INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

**WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT
CONFERENCE (WTDC-98)**

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PLENARY MEETING

Tanzania

GENDER ISSUES

I Telecommunications is a catalyst in development. Women are the core of the family unit and the biggest producers at family, rural villages and poor urban centres, as well as being the crucial budget and resource managers at all families are central in any true development. If therefore telecomms rightly address true development especially for developing countries and Africa in particular, then it will address women concerns and involve them. Telecommunications in this context comprises the broader meaning, i.e. telephony, telex, fax, information technology, broadcasting (radio and TV), multimedia and Internet relevantly depending on which women hence society we are involved with.

II The following telecommunications (or info-communications) areas if given priority and targeted to women and especially rural and urban poor and middle level women will have the highest impact to women, the family unit and development of a country as a whole:

1) Telephony incorporating fax and telex:

To impact on women by reducing their burden and putting them in communication, the following be stressed:

- a) Residential telephony/fax relevantly rather than business phones.
- b) Pay phones, telecommunication centres and attended call offices/centres be located at:
 - i) residential areas;
 - ii) market places and other mainly women business centres;
 - iii) community centres;
 - iv) clinics/hospitals;
 - v) community water supply areas;
 - vi) schools.
- c) In addition to mobile cellular phones being made available and licensed as well as implemented on a total area coverage as opposed to point-to-point only, especially along the "highway or cross-country cells", new cheap technology like the Japanese technology of PHS (the poor man's cellular mobile) be exploited to provide women with mobile telephony.

d) New technologies like GMPCS be exploited as another option or alternative for providing telephony to areas as in b) above.

2 Broadcasting (radio and TV). The transistor radio using the dry battery/cell has proven its worth in penetrating even the remotest parts of developing countries. This is because they are rugged and have portable energy/power supply though of course the cells need replacement but at least they are easily distributable. For TV to have the same impact it has to approach that transistor radio ruggedness and energy/power supply portability or at least not main power supply dependent. TVs that use solar energy or such other nature power source would be a revolution. The communication centres, schools, community centres etc. could become mini "multimedia" centres.

3 Information technology and multimedia: Email, Internet and similar services could be of great value to educate rural and middle level urban women in addition to the upper level women in our countries. By connecting women into the information society, you are connecting the family and future generations. Africa for example would be "cheetah pole-vaulting" into the Global Information Society if our efforts are multipronged. They should target the upper spectrum of users while targeting women in the lower spectrum where they are, i.e. take the GII to them, not take women to GII.

NB "Cheetah pole-vaulting" is better than the "leap-frog" of technologies, services and development stages followed by the developed North.

4 By combining and utilizing 1), 2) and 3) above, the following mass two-way communication areas are critical to be taken with women as a major user group:

- a) Telemedicine - To be distributed to all clinics, hospitals and health centres as much as possible.
- b) Distance - Learning to be available as widely as possible and be as wide in content as possible. The content should target improvement of primary and secondary education, provision and improvement of tertiary education, skills development and provision of university and other post-secondary education through schemes like Open University and virtual university.
- c) Mass mobilization for activities as well as democracy promotion.

5 Conduit vs. content

While items 1) to 4) above have dealt mostly with conduit (i.e. the means to deliver information/knowledge) it is important that steps be taken to localize content and women to have a role in determining content. It is important to note that content which is gender sensitive, is also family sensitive hence definitely society development relevant.

III In conclusion it is obvious that the steps highlighted under I and II above have to be taken. It is also obvious that telecommunications (or infocommunications) that is gender sensitive and puts women at its centre not as an after-thought, has the highest impact to development and the improvement of the quality of life for the family and the community/society. The question is therefore not of whether but of how and when to take the steps above. The policy, regulatory, technological, operational and business environments, frameworks and practices should be such as to facilitate and be a catalyst to having positive answer to the how and when.