

Statement of the Gender Caucus – Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 2005  
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Given that there is strong evidence that gender is an important dimension in both economic and social development policy analysis and development policy formulation as well. The gender caucus notes with concern that from Geneva to Tunis, as we move from principles to implementation, mentions about women empowerment and gender equality in the text have been reducing. The Tunis Agenda for Action is completely silent on gender in all aspects of implementation. We find this silence/deficiency unacceptable and something that must be corrected.

Gender relations play a critical role in influencing the outcome of macro-level policies. Women and men are located differently in the economy with different entitlements and capabilities. (That is to say that men and women have access to different resources, skills, knowledge and training in the economy and society.) These entitlements are conditioned by the gender system and the gender relations at the macro, meso and micro levels. Hence, macro policy shifts, whether of the fiscal and monetary varieties or, of trade and investment may exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

The gender caucus believes that the current debate on financing in the WSIS process puts disproportionate emphasis on private investment to achieve ICTD goals. While economic growth may be best served by private investment models, development encompasses (includes) much more than economic growth, and is premised (based) on social justice and equity. ICTD needs to be placed squarely (properly) within a framework that recognises the social justice basis of the information society. Financing ICTD must account specifically for women's development priorities and their information and communication rights.

Existing financial mechanisms, promoted by markets and private sector investments have not taken connectivity and the gains from ICTs to regions that the Tunis agenda for action calls "less attractive", and populations that are excluded. Women constitute a large majority of the excluded. The role of public finance - at local, national and international levels - in reaching connectivity, as well as the larger benefits of ICTD to women, cannot be over-emphasized, especially in the context of what the Tunis agenda for action calls "market challenges".

Connectivity and macro indices like tele-density, internet access etc. often hide more than reveal. Investments are certainly required to reach connectivity and to provide telephones and internet, but by themselves, ICTs cannot bring empowering outcomes for women. ICTs need to be linked to development in ways that are empowering for women. This calls for ICT-enabling the mainstream institutions of development that women engage with: in the community, in government and in the market. It calls for adopting an ICTD approach that sets up institutional mechanisms so that ICTs are leveraged for gender equality beyond small scale 'pilots'.

ICTD needs to be seen through the lens of social investment that is time and resource intensive. The gestation between investment and returns need to be recognized. Challenges to include the poorest women will be the maximum considering the obstacles – social and economic - they face to participate in the information society. This calls for the underwriting (covering) of the costs that are involved in bringing poor women into the net of beneficiaries through active leadership and motivation at community levels, especially through local bodies – government and ngo; and the delivery of values that promote women’s rights to livelihood, health, education, etc.

Even as the Tunis plan of action holds up Multi Stake holder Partnerships as the preferred route, within MSPs it is crucial to determine who holds the key control and therefore who benefits more. Women are unlikely to be the locus of control where powerful private and government players are involved. Structures and mechanisms at the local level, that are gender sensitive are required to enable women’s equal participation and ownership in any partnerships.

The Digital Solidarity Fund promotes the interests of women through its focus on qualitative outcomes of ICTD funding and interventions. Women’s empowerment is a qualitative issue and not merely an issue of macro indicators like teledensity. All financing mechanisms need to ensure a gender and regional balance in their administrative structures. The development of indicators and monitoring mechanisms to ensure outcomes for gender equality is critical at national and local levels.

“Open access” telecom policies enable the reduction of costs of connectivity, especially to currently underserved areas. Rural women represent one of the most excluded in the information society and stand to gain from open access.

The role of public resources is critical for

- Appropriate technologies that account for women’s roles and interests. These are beyond telecom technologies and include software and applications that are localized. Technology paradigms like open source and open content serve the interests of poor women.
- Developing ICT-enabled services, and institutions for delivering them, which serve the needs and interests of women
- Local content production and dissemination especially relevant for poor and disadvantaged women.
- Building women’s capacities to benefit from ICTs
- The use of ICTs as a catalyst for better governance and to give women a stronger voice in democratic processes.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, this is the opportunity to make a difference in this debate, must to do it.