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**ITU COUNCIL WORKING GROUP
ON INTERNATIONAL INTERNET-RELATED PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES
(CWG-INTERNET)**

**Online Open Consultations on
"Bridging the Digital Gender Divide"**

(October 2017- January 2018)

Deadline for submissions: 5 January 2018

SUMMARY

The Australian Government believes that women should have equal opportunity to access and make the most of the digital economy. Australia has implemented a range of policy initiatives and development programs, both domestically and internationally, with the aim of bridging the digital gender divide. Australia recognises that governments need to work in partnership with businesses and the community to bridge this divide.

The Australian Government is investing in a variety of policy initiatives and development programs to enable women and girls to improve their digital literacy and participate in the digital economy. The Government is investing in a digital technologies curriculum as well as a grants program to foster women and girls' participation in science, technology, engineering and entrepreneurship sectors. Bridging the digital gender divide is not just about skills and access, but about supporting women to have meaningful careers, especially as digital entrepreneurs and as leaders in the digital economy. Australia is strongly committed to being at the forefront of efforts to ensure the digital economy equally benefits women and girls, with opportunities and resources to reach their full potential.

Women's participation in the digital economy is only possible when they feel respected and safe in the workplace and online. The Australian Government provides a range of services and initiatives to raise awareness, to assist women and girls to be safe online and support victims of gender-based violence through digital technologies.

Australia

Consideration is given to the needs of disadvantaged groups, including women and girls, in all Australian Government policy and program development. This submission discusses Australian Government policy initiatives and development programs that aim to address “bridging the digital gender divide” domestically and internationally.

Question 1:

What approaches and examples of good practices are available to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls, including in decision-making processes on Internet public policy?

Context

Participation by Australian girls and women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) at school and university remains a challenge. For example, a 2013 paper from the Australian Council of Learned Academies notes that the participation of girls in at least one mathematics and one science subject after year 10 has been decreasing since 2001. Further, women occupy fewer than one in five senior researcher positions in Australian universities and research institutes, and around one quarter of the STEM workforce overall. Only one in four IT graduates and fewer than one in eight engineering graduates are women.

National Innovation and Science Agenda

Under the AUD \$112 million **Inspiring all Australians in Digital Literacy and STEM** measure of the National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA), the Australian Government is delivering initiatives to encourage participation in STEM and entrepreneurship and improve the teaching and learning of STEM in our early learning centres and schools. A focus of these initiatives is increasing the engagement of underrepresented groups, including girls. The measure includes AUD \$13 million over 2016-17 to 2019-20 (and AUD\$1 million per year thereafter) to encourage more girls and women to choose to study STEM and pursue STEM-based and entrepreneurial careers. NISA initiatives are contributing to ongoing efforts across the Australian Government to increase women and girl’s participation in STEM, and bridge the digital gender divide, such as:

- Expanding the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) program, which runs training workshops on gender equity and provides accreditation for universities, medical research centres and government research organisations.
- Supporting the new group of Male Champions of Change focused on STEM-based and entrepreneurial industries, which aims to achieve change on gender equality issues in organisations and communities.
- Investing AUD \$4.6 million to expand the Pathways in Technology (P-TECH) pilot from two sites to 14 sites across Australia, which facilitates long-term partnerships between industry, schools and tertiary education providers to enable business to play an active role in the learning and career development of students, including young women.
- Investing AUD \$3 million to establish a new National Career Education Strategy to equip high school students to make better-informed decisions about post-school education, training or work, with a particular focus on supporting girls to study STEM subjects.
- Providing AUD \$24 million for Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships, which support 1,200 regional students to undertake STEM studies.
- Investing AUD \$25 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the 1967 Referendum 50th Anniversary Indigenous Education Package for a new STEM Scholarships fund to support Indigenous students to study and secure jobs in STEM fields, including AUD \$15 million to establish a dedicated Girls STEM Academy.

Australia

NISA focuses on harnessing the opportunities brought by innovation and science to deliver new sources of growth and position Australia for the future through four key pillars of culture and capital, collaboration, talent and skills, and government as an exemplar.

Under NISA, the Government supported 24 projects through the first round of the Women in STEM and Entrepreneurship program in 2016, including many aimed at students. This includes supporting:

- coding training for primary schools girls;
- drone camps in Northern Australia; and
- entrepreneurship training for high school students.

The Government expects to support many more initiatives through the second round of this program, which recently closed.

Towards 2025: An Australian Government Strategy to Boost Women's Workforce Participation identifies Australian Government actions, such as NISA, for increasing women's participation in STEM in relation to both the education sector and the workforce.

Women's safety

Safe access to technology is also crucial for women so they can stay connected to their family and friends, engage with the world, take advantage of education and economic opportunities, and access information and support. As part of a larger package addressing Women's Safety, Australia's Office of the eSafety Commissioner has established **eSafetyWomen** – a set of internet resources to help women manage technology risks and abuse by giving them tools to be confident when online. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner plans to continually update and add resources to eSafetyWomen and will in future include targeted resources for Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and women with disabilities.

The National Broadband Network (NBN)

The Australian Government is investing more in regional telecommunications infrastructure than ever before. The Government has committed to the rollout of the NBN as soon as possible, improving access to high speed broadband services across regional, rural and remote Australia. NBN rollout is already over three quarters complete outside major urban areas. Every day thousands of regional, rural and remote Australians - students, farmers, families and business owners, including girls and women - are benefitting from these improved services including greater social inclusion and equality of opportunity.

Sub-national efforts

The State of New South Wales (NSW) has a range of policies in place that educate on and encourage digital literacy. Two key examples include:

- **Digital citizenship:** a combination of education in NSW government schools teaching students to be safe and responsible digital citizens (including appropriate technological use and awareness of dangers online), and a website providing information for students, parents and teachers.
- **Jobs of Tomorrow scholarships:** offered to eligible students to undertake high-level Smart and Skilled qualifications in technology-based growth industries, with a focus on STEM.

International efforts

Australia also supports a number of international initiatives to empower women and girls to develop their digital literacy. Australia supports the Girl Effect, a non-profit organization, to help build young women's leadership, voice and agency in Bangladesh through an innovative research model, **Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors (TEGA)**. TEGA trains young women aged 18-24 in data-collection techniques and mobile technology to collect real-time data in their communities. With insights from the data, Girl Effect and its partners' programs can better address the concerns of women and girls. TEGA also builds agency and leadership for young women through strengthening their voice, and increasing confidence, leadership and connections through the development of new digital skills.

Building on **Women's World Banking's (WWB)** experience trialling digital solutions for low income women throughout the world, Australia is supporting WWB over the next four years to expand their programs in South East Asia. Increasing the reach and use of digital financial services is a key strategy to help overcome the financial inclusion gender gap. WWB will test innovative programs such as driving the uptake and use of mobile accounts by women in Indonesia, and supporting digital insurance service providers in Cambodia expand into new areas.

Question 2:

What approaches and examples of good practices are available to promote the access and use of ICTs by SMEs in developing and least-developed countries, particularly those owned/managed by women, in order to achieve greater participation in the digital economy?

The growing adoption of mobile phones and technology has provided opportunities to empower and enable women in developing and least-developed countries, often circumnavigating power architectures in families and society in order to allow greater participation. Program such as **Group Speciale Mobile Association (GSMA) mWomen** program (Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] funded *mWomen* in 2014) seek to increase the agency of women using technology. Research conducted by the GSMA found that women entrepreneurs play a critical role in economic development both through their active participation in the workforce and their ability to innovate and lead. The GSMA *Ecosystem Accelerator* program (DFAT fund the Ecosystem Accelerator), seeks to pair social impact start-ups with mobile operators in order to increase their reach and impact. Engagement activities this year showed improvement in the number of women entrepreneurs in developing countries. Among the top 100 start-ups from Africa and Asia Pacific that submitted their application for Round 2 of the GSMA *Ecosystem Accelerator* program, 25 per cent were founded or co-founded by women entrepreneurs. Further, there is a market opportunity for mobile service providers to deliver mobile-enabled gender sensitive agricultural services for rural female farmers. These services, particularly those delivered to female-owned SMEs, offer substantial social benefits such as: amplified leadership of women in decision making processes, female-influenced resource allocation, alternative use of land, finances and increased business opportunities within families, villages and communities in rural area.

Question 3:

Which are the available sources and mechanisms for measuring women's participation in the digital economy with focus on SME's and micro-enterprises?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) *Household Use of Information Technology* publication provides tables of data on number of internet users, hours spent online in a typical week, reasons for

Australia

accessing the internet, type of goods purchased online, and whether used the internet for home based work, by sex. The most recent data published is for 2014-15.

The OECD Working Party for National Accounts has formed an advisory group to advance the measurement of the digital economy agenda. The work of the group, of which the ABS is a member, will help to shape the discussion on quantifying the effects of the digital economy on the broader economy and productivity measures. Specifically, the group is tasked with the following four issues:

- Clarify the statistical concepts relevant to the digital economy (products, industries, potential data sources, new opportunities to collect data, potential indicators etc.).
- Quantify potential mismeasurement issues, including the adequacy of price indexes and investment due to the partial use of consumer durables as business assets.
- Quantify the value of 'free' goods and services.
- Quantify cross border digital economy related trade, including e-commerce, digital services and IP products.

The final report is to be presented at the 2018 Working Party of National Accounts meeting (November 2018). In the interim, the ABS National Accounts plans to undertake its own research work to investigate the size of the GDP gap which would be necessary to bring total productivity growth to rates seen in the 1990s. Further, analysis of digital intermediate input use will be investigated using annual data. The ABS is committed to advancing work in economic statistics generally and specifically in the area of productivity measurement.

Question 4:

What measures/policies could be envisioned in order to foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs, specifically in developing and least-developed countries?

Australia is strongly committed to being at the forefront of efforts to give women and girls the opportunities and resources to reach their full potential. Financial inclusion is a requirement for women's economic empowerment; supporting women and girls to improve financial literacy and access to formal financial services to enable the effective utilisation of financial resources. In supporting women's economic empowerment, Australia is committed to:

- address barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, including the market supply-side gap preventing women from accessing finance;
- enhance access to financial services for women; and
- support financial literacy and education for women and girls.

Australia is strongly engaged in the G20's work on financial inclusion and remittances, particularly through the Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPII). The GPII has in recent years sought to mainstream gender considerations across its work, including SME financing, payment systems, remittance transfers, financial literacy and consumer protection. In addition, the GPII has released reports on specific issues within these work areas such as the "Digital Financial Solutions to Advance Women's Economic Participation" report, available on the GPII website: www.gpii.org

Women's economic empowerment is a key priority for Australia's aid for trade investments. Australia's aid for trade strategy requires investments to prioritise the economic empowerment of women. This

Australia

includes helping women entrepreneurs in developing countries to connect their businesses to global markets, for example:

- In partnership with the Export Council of Australia, the Australian Government is helping women entrepreneurs in the Pacific to develop their businesses to become export ready. The Australia Awards: Women Trading Globally short course, which was launched in November 2017, builds the knowledge and skills of women entrepreneurs and connects them to future commercial opportunities, including with Australian business. The course includes formal training and establishing mentor relationships with successful Australian exporters. The Australian Government will contribute \$2.1 million over the next three years for this initiative.
- In partnership with the International Trade Centre, Australia is increasing the participation of export-ready Women Business Enterprises in international trade and investment around the Indian Ocean Rim. This work addresses access to markets by Women Business Enterprises by building their export competitiveness, in both trade and investment. It works with buyers and Trade Promotion Organisations. Since 2015, 42 women-owned/-led SMEs have been connected to 169 potential buyers, with sales of US\$637,000 to date.

There is a gender gap in access to capital for Women Small to Medium Enterprises (WSMEs) in the Indo-Pacific region. Women entrepreneurs could be a large source of job creation (for women and men), stimulating innovation and change in production and marketing. However, women often face barriers to growing their businesses such as lack of access to banking and credit, low financial literacy rates, lack of appropriate financial products and services to meet their needs. In spite of these challenges there is strong support for financial inclusion from governments and from banks, and increasing interest and potential for digital financial services to impact on WSMEs (see Q1).

The Australia government supports WSMEs in our region by helping address the barriers women face in the workforce and in business, and the social and gender norms and bias that underpin these barriers. Examples include:

Investing in Women (AUD \$43.8m, 2016-19, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar) includes a component to increase impact investments in women owned and led SMEs by incentivising, through financial and other support, a small number of impact investors operating in the region to focus investments on WSMEs. We expect to produce credible evidence to demonstrate the social and financial benefits of investing in WSMEs, giving other investors the confidence to invest and multiplying the value of the program.

Markets for Change (AUD \$17m 2014-19 Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu) in partnership with UN Women seeks to ensure that market vendors (between 70 and 90 per cent of whom are women) are more empowered to advocate for their needs, increase their business acumen and grow their businesses. We have supported five new market vendors associations, trained 278 market vendor association executive committee members, and provided financial literacy and small business training to 1,465 market vendors. We ensure market spaces are safe, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Question 5:

What are the gaps in addressing these challenges? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?

There is a substantial gap in gender-disaggregated data on participation in the digital economy, across all levels; notably there is limited data evidencing the digital gender divide. Time Use Surveys are a widely recognised source of data that could be adapted to quantify use of time by men and women within the digital economy. This could generate valuable data for policy makers on addressing gender gaps in the digital economy. Governments could undertake greater gender-disaggregated data collection on the digital gender divide, including through survey instruments such as a Time Use Survey.

There are a range of gender gaps related to the digital gender divide that Government could have a constructive role in addressing through policies and programs. These areas include:

- Women face higher **access barriers** to technologies and digital financial services.
- Women also face a **skills gap**, preventing them from fully participating as either consumers or producers of digital technologies and financial services.
- There is a female **participation and leadership gap** in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and STEM-related careers and entrepreneurship.
- **Regulatory barriers** can emerge where legal frameworks lack a digital and gender perspective, creating structural impediments to women's equal participation.