

Bridging the Digital Gender Divide ITU Council Working Group on Internet ESOA Contribution

ESOA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ITU's CWG - Internet consultation to address gender equality for Internet users.

ESOA is a non-profit organisation established with the objective of serving and promoting the common interests of satellite operators from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the CIS. Together ESOA Members, who also include manufacturers, equipment providers and launch service providers, provide invaluable communications services to the whole world, including live broadcasting, broadband, emergency communications, maritime and aero communications, secure communications, 24/7 monitoring of industrial processes such as energy plants, weather forecasting and a whole range of other communications services.

Satellite communications contribute to bridging the Digital Gender Divide by bringing education to rural areas or refugee camps, enabling digital financial inclusion or allowing citizens to participate in democratic elections.

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?

Government funded projects focussed on the inclusion of women and girls in digital programs (linked to e.g. health, education, agriculture, fintech) are an excellent way to increase levels digital literacy amongst women and girls.

Example 1

In education the UK's Department of International Development (DFID) is leading the way in the delivery of education for marginalized women and girls across the developing world through the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) Program. Whilst the GEC does not specify per se the use of ICTs or Internet for meeting the requirements of the program, there are good examples within the portfolio of projects where Internet based delivery of teaching and learning is a core component (including the use of mobile technologies). In particular DFID as partnered with private sector organisations such as Avanti Communications, Ericsson, Coca Cola and Discovery Communications all of which use of technology to support their educational interventions.

A specific example is the iMlango project led by Avanti Communications which is delivering an on-line learning intervention in 205 primary schools in Kenya. Each school in the program is equipped with satellite broadband, computer equipment, content around numeracy and literacy as well as teacher training and support.

The GEC requires a focus on the needs of girls and women and specifically as part of the project there is a requirement to conduct a gender analysis, and to promotion of gender sensitive pedagogical approaches. Boys are not the main focus of the program but GEC requires that they not be excluded to avoid backlash from the boys or their communities.

Example 2

Satellite operators are frequently involved in training local communities in the installation & operation of satellite terminals. One such program is ELEVATE run by global satellite operator SES. Elevate involves a two-day course designed to train local women and young people to become satellite installers while at the same time improve quality satellite TV installations in Africa. The Certificate awarded after the course opens up job opportunities and provides the skillset required to empower women to become financially independent.

On Day 1 the course introduces practical health and safety concerns, how to manage customer care and how to interact with a customer, as well as the basics about satellite TV and installation, for example how the LNB works, and how a satellite transmits a signal.

Day 2 involves a marketing workshop, which shows students how to build a business plan and how to run their business successfully.

Finally, the students do a practical exercise where they have to install a DTH antenna, connect it to a set-top-box, obtain a signal from the satellite, interact with a customer, and explain to them how to set-up the set-top-box. At the end of the training, trainees receive Satfinders, basic tool kits, marketing tools (business card templates, brochure templates etc.) and a certificate so that they have sufficient knowledge - both technical and business - to run their own business. There is also a “Train the Trainer” program, where installers are taught to become a trainer themselves - so they learn how to stand in a room full of students and transmit that knowledge to others.

To date, the program has resulted more than 8,000 installers, a proportion of which are women, across 15 countries being trained including Cameroon, Cote D'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania.

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?

Parts of the UN such as UNIDO and UN Women are exploring the use of ICTs to support small businesses run by women in the Middle East.

The UN's own program, the “Girls in ICT Day,” is a prime example of how governments can support these policies simply by promoting the issue on their websites and providing the opportunity for the tech industry in their communities to participate in events. In 2017, we note that Samoa (led by a woman regulator)¹, the Caribbean Community², and Zambia³ all held events on that day (as well as many other nations and companies). By pronouncing a “day” on which the whole world should focus on this issue, the ITU has made it easier for their member administrations to justify their own time and attention to the issue, and in turn for the industries in those nations to realize that the education and training of girls and women in ICT provides a wider pool of trained and educated employees. Finally, just by informing the world that this is an issue of value, the ITU has provided an incentive for girls themselves to pursue training in ICT.

¹ http://www.samoaoobserver.ws/en/13_04_2017/local/18967/Samoa-promotes-women-in-ICT.htm

² <http://today.caricom.org/2017/04/27/girls-in-ict-day-2017/>

³ <https://asikananetwork.org/2017/05/02/girls-in-ict-day-2017/>

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?

Certain governments in Africa, e.g. Kenya, have started to fund the deployment of public WiFi services in rural areas for ICT capacity building and making available for local small businesses to have access to fast internet connections (not available on 2G/3G mobile networks) and access devices.

Such initiatives are a mechanism to ensure the deployment of the necessary infrastructure in the rural areas where many women work in micro enterprises, for example linked to agriculture.

Deployment of infrastructure alone is insufficient to promote equal access so such programs need to be coupled with interventions from national governments or international donors that focus on capacity building for women.

Question 5: What are the gaps in addressing these challenges? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?

Many opportunities for women, girls and communities as a whole are lost due to the lack of telecommunication/ICT infrastructure, which is vital to bridge the Digital and Gender Divide and foster the role of women in society. Satellite is an important tool to address this issue.

Governments should ensure timely access to such modern, secure, affordable and accessible telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and make more use of satellite technology to achieve this objective.

Skills training and coaching are particularly important for women entrepreneurs and can make a difference to their ability to be financially independent as can be seen from in the ELEVATE example given in question 1.

While education in schools contributes to literacy, ongoing training, coaching and other support facilities such as bank grants for women are also directly relevant.

Government projects continuity: The ICT education of girls and women is a long term goal, achievable in the medium term. It is therefore important that government projects are not merely one-off initiatives but provide continuity over several years. In addition to the exponential growth in access to ICT, it has the benefit of providing efficient use of equipment and resources.

In addition, governments should (i) collect data in order to identify gaps at country level, particularly in rural regions; (ii) provide funding to improve infrastructure, especially transport and (iii) stimulate the banking system to establish funds and grants for women-led companies and to provide specific services-advises for women entrepreneurs.