



Internet Society Contribution to the ITU Council Working Group
on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues (CWG-Internet)

January 11, 2018

The Internet Society (ISOC) is pleased to participate in the CWG-Internet Open Consultation on “Bridging the Digital Gender Divide.” This is an important discussion given the tremendous progress that still needs to be made to increase Internet penetration rates amongst women and girls, and to close the wide geographic and regional disparities that exist between women and men in Internet access and digital literacy.

Since the creation of the Internet Society more than twenty-five years ago, we have been guided by a fundamental principle that stresses an inclusive dimension in all of our activities: “The Internet is for everyone.” This principle has been adopted in our work around the world to expand Internet access and participation for all individuals in society, and that includes women. Women play a central role in their households and in their communities. Empowering women through Internet access and ICTs is an investment that yields a range of benefits that affect not just women but their families and communities as a whole.

The gender digital divide is widening. As the [Internet Society’s recent Global Internet Report: Paths to The Digital Future](#) shows, new digital divides are emerging and one of them is a gender divide. According to the ITU, there are 250 million fewer women online than men. In this context, it is important to act now to close this gap. Consultations such as these that facilitate open dialogue and the exchange of ideas and information amongst diverse stakeholders are critical to finding solutions to address the gender digital divide. Our contribution highlights several initiatives we are undertaking to tackle this issue head on.

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?

Public and private sector investment in initiatives aimed at empowering women and girls in ICTs are an effective approach to support and increase Internet access and digital literacy amongst women and girls.

ISOC supports the ITU EQUALS which is intended to promote gender equality and mainstreaming in technology. ISOC joined the EQUALS coalitions and is participating in issue formulation, advocacy, networking, good practice guidance, capacity development, and programme work.

ISOC’s [Beyond the Net Funding Programme](#), a membership grants program, supports local initiatives. Since the start of the program in 2015, ISOC has supported more than 12 projects to empower and engage women and girls in ICTs across the world. Past grantees and partners include:

- iLab Liberia, which links female students with ICT companies’ mentorship programmes and holds ICT career fairs for young women; the Chuuk Women’s Council, an umbrella organization in the Chuuk state which has set up a computer learning lab for women in the island nation; the Pakistan Social Association, which has trained hundreds of young girls from rural Pakistan in digital literacy with the goal of encouraging them to pursue careers in ICT;



- the Jhuwani Community Library, which promotes the use of a local mobile app to enable pregnant women to regularly access prenatal care in Nepal;
- the Women Experts in Computer Maintenance and Internet Security which has trained women and girls in six high schools in Oruro, Bolivia to learn computing and web-related technologies, enable to find better employment opportunities and become promoters of technological innovation and social change on the principles of responsible Internet; and
- the Hamara Internet which is an initiative aiming to provide women with the skills and digital tools required to create safe online spaces for themselves and others. The project allows women to be empowered by Internet technologies, and to advocate for more gender-inclusive Internet governance processes at national level.

As regards the inclusion of women in decision-making processes, the Internet Society supports the [Internet Governance Multistakeholder approach](#) where all stakeholders with a vested interest should participate and have an equal voice at the table on Internet policy matters. Ensuring that there is greater gender balance in the decision-making processes demands proactive steps that encourage more women to participate, consider leadership opportunities and build the capacity of women with leadership and decision-making skills. ISOC administers several fellowship programs for its members to increase the capacity of next generation of leaders in Internet Governance: IGF Ambassadors Program, IETF Technical Fellows Program, and Fellowship Programs to the various ITU assemblies and conferences. Cultural, geographic and gender diversity is encouraged and are key considerations in the selection process for all fellowships. In addition, the Internet Society Chapter of Sri Lanka is organizing the first Women's IGF this year through support from ISOC's Beyond the Net Program. Also, the [Internet Society Special Interest Group \(SIG\) for Women](#) was formed by its members to promote neutral spaces that encourage the involvement of women in technology and contribute to reducing the gender digital gap. The SIG was borne from the determination amongst ISOC members to change the low statistics of women accessing and using technology.

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?

As an example of a good approach to promote the access and use of ICTs by SMEs and entrepreneurs, the Internet Society supports the Wireless Women for Entrepreneurship & Empowerment (W2E2) programme. W2E2 has been launched to create women driven ICT micro social enterprise and entrepreneurs supported by wireless Internet in socially backward locations or districts of India, and contribute to enable an environment for Internet for gender inclusion and women empowerment. Digital Empowerment Foundation has initiated the W2E2 programme and selected 10 women from across various domains of SHGs, agriculture, teaching, etc., from Chanderi, Baran, Shivpuri and Tura to empower them for multiplying the process under which selected women are trained and after that these trained women spread knowledge to other women.

More information about the programme: <http://defindia.org/w2e2/>

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?

Not applicable.



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?

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Women's Entrepreneurship 2016/2017 Report¹, women entrepreneurs are less likely to be seen in the ICT sector. Overall, fewer than 2% are starting business here, little more than one-fourth the proportion of men on average. In this context, there are many measures/policies that need to be developed to foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs, we have identified the following:

- Policies need to be balanced and fair to allow women to compete. In most developing and least-developed countries, women tend to identify access to finance as the first or second barrier to developing their business and, as such starting and sustain a business without any sort of funding becomes very difficult. According to the World Bank², seventy percent of formal women-owned SMEs in developing countries are either shut out of financial institutions or can't get the capital they need, which results in a nearly \$300 billion annual credit deficit for formal women-owned SMEs. While in 2017, the World Bank presented the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, more measures need to be put in place to allow qualified women entrepreneurs to apply for funding.
- Practices that “build in women leadership by design” shift norms and value systems that identify and enable more women to pursue leadership and management path, challenge leadership styles and meaning of leadership that are customary in male dominated ICT environment, and increase visibility and recognition of women in leadership roles to serve as an example for other women and girls. These practices emerged from a side event at WTDC 2017 titled “Shaping the Future of the Internet with Gender Equality.” The side event was organized by the Internet Society in partnership with International Development Research Center of Canada (IDRC/Canada), Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Google, and with participation from the Argentinian Government and ITU EQUALS in Tech. The aim was to start an open around two main issues: 1) Access and 2) Leadership for Gender Equality. The expected outcome was to develop recommendations that policymakers in ICTs could use as roadmap to achieve SDG-5, to empower women and girls into the digital society.³ During the event, participants identified several barriers that women confront when entering leadership positions and during the breakout sessions developed several solutions:
 - “**Lack of self-confidence:** Women confronted by barrage of messages on how they don't measure up and do not have the proper skills to succeed in a man-focused technology world. Therefore, the result is that many women do not share the same confidence of their male colleagues.”
 - “**Pressure:** Women often need to work twice as hard as men to get the same recognition and if they fail, they fail twice as hard and are sometimes criticized more than male-

¹ Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, available at: <http://www.gemconsortium.org/report>

² World Bank, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/women-entrepreneurs>

³ Government of Canada. (2017) Summary Report of the Side-Event: Shaping the future of the internet with gender equality. Retrieved from here: <https://www.itu.int/md/D14-WTDC17-INF-0003/en>



counterparts. Those notions feed the pressure women feel in taking on leadership positions in the ICTs world.”

- **“Stereotypes:** Women contend with several socially constructed barriers which impact their ability to work in the digital sector. One barrier is that higher education on STEM fields are often ‘not seen’ as appropriate for women, and they are steered away from these careers. Even if they overcome this, that stereotyping adds a barrier to positioning themselves in leadership roles.”

Shine the Light Campaign:

The importance of role models for women and girls cannot be underestimated. As in the results reveal from the side event in Argentina, celebrating women leaders in the community sends message to other girls and women that women are very capable leaders. ISOC developed the #Shinethelight, which is a social media campaign showcasing women stories and promoting empowerment through different leadership examples of women who are using the Internet to innovate and make a difference in their countries. More information about the campaign available at:

<http://www.internetsociety.org/shinethelight>

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

We can identify the followings gaps and barriers when addressing the challenges that women face today to become entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs:

- Availability of relevant policies (e.g. policies with a gender focus and/or that address women's ability to become entrepreneurs)
- Skills (e.g. lacking skills and confidence to develop a business and to explore technology)
- Women's participation in decision-making roles pertaining to the Internet and/or in the technology sector (e.g. when women are not able to pursue careers in science and technology when their participation in relevant policymaking fora is restricted)
- Threats or safety concerns (e.g. women who are afraid of being exposed to the risk of harassment, attacks or other kinds of threats from males and other women because they are not following traditional paths)