

**REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS**

**MINISTRY OF TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATION AND INNOVATION**

“Bridging the Digital Gender Divide”

Introduction

In Mauritius, there is no gender disparity against girls in primary and secondary education. Based on 2014 statistics, academic performance of girls in all 3 levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) are better compared to boys. Moreover, the enrolment for students at tertiary level shows a widening gap in favour of girls.

Since our education curriculum is actively introducing ICT throughout the school life of a student, this results in an increased number of school leavers who are well trained to fit the sophisticated digital world.

Work environment has greatly evolved with the introduction of new business technology such as video conferencing, social networks and virtual office technology. Both gender are equally exposed to such technologies.

Moreover, technology can be considered as an industry by itself. Software development or development of mobile apps and BPO are major sectors that could be exploited for the employment of women, if they are given the appropriate level of training and support.

Technology can also contribute significantly through deployment of online course. This means of training is a valuable/cost effective method for continuous education with minimal impact on active work/family life. It promotes flexibility and adaptability.

Moreover, with the aim to further bridge the gender divide, IC3 & ICT Awareness courses are provided to Women Associations of different regions across Mauritius, through Women Centres, Social Welfare Centre, Women Empowerment Centre, Youth Centres, etc

Transformation of certain industries from a labour intensive work force to a motorised/automated environment has resulted in less physical effort but more technical know- how on the machinery operation, which placed man & women on level playing field. With the opportunity to manoeuvre motorized tool, women now have the possibility to join these sectors.

Given the multiple roles of women in society, working remotely/working from home could be considered as this will allow women to balance their work and family priorities. Adoption of this concept would also encourage women to enter the labour market through jobs like translators/Document editors or entrepreneur and small home office businesses.

Furthermore, social media can be used as a powerful marketing tool which consequently increase product/brand visibility locally, regionally and internationally, resulting in expansion of business for women entrepreneur

Laws, policies, and procedures that promote gender equality should address barriers to women and girls’ access to technology and unlock opportunities and send positive messages to women.

The contribution of the Ministry to the different topics to be discussed are as follows:

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.**

* Development of gender responsive ICT curricula for secondary and tertiary education
* Participation of women in ICT related conferences, meetings and events
* Developing a gender dashboard to monitor progress of women in digital literacy

In Mauritius digital literacy is available as a non-core subject as from the Primary Schools to both boys and girls. Besides in the secondary education system, it is a core subject till Grade 9 and as from Grade 10 it is optional.

However, in the Tertiary education system, digital literacy is a must as most of the notes and course work are provided by mail and students are requested to submit their projects online**.**

With the introduction of the Wi-Fi Mauritius initiative where Wi-Fi access is now provided freely to the public in 350 public places across the Island including Community Centres, Social Welfare Centres, Women Centres, Youth Centres, Village Council and Post Offices, this initiative has opened up access for all. This project has led to an increase in the demand for Smart Phones and Tablets irrespective of gender as more and more people are willing to connect.

Therefore, men and women alike have equal access to technology.

Access to technology is not reserved for grown-ups. Our young children at Grades I and II will be provided with tablets as from 2018. With the completion of the School Net II project of the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation by end of the year, each secondary school will have 10 Mbps Internet connectivity. Primary schools will be equipped with broadband connectivity by 2019. In this way, young girls and boys will benefit access to technology.

There is an increase in demand for internet access by households as more and more organisations are providing remote access to work emails so as to encourage their employees to work from home and hence spending more time with their families.

Another initiative of the Prime Minister’s Office is the Citizen Support Portal, where Citizens can directly send their requests and share their concerns and ideas with Ministries, departments, para-statals and local authorities facilitated by Citizen Advice Bureau and Post Offices. The portal www.csu.mu allows the government to adopt a more citizen-centric approach with the aim of building a modern and better Mauritius.

The Government is also focusing on bringing more and more e-services and Mobile apps to encourage our Citizens to increase digital access and literacy.

1. **What approaches and examples of good practices are available to promote the access and use of ICT’s by SME’s in developing and least developed countries, particularly those owned/ managed by women, in order to achieve greater participation in the digital economy.**

**Examples of Good Practices**

* The Development Bank of Mauritius offers Micro financing Schemes at the rate of 3%p.a. to Women owned SME’s among others to agricultural, manufacturing, fishing, Handicraft and to artists.

Moreover the SME Financing Schemes offers loan at the rate of 6% p.a. to encourage

developments of Projects in ICT Sector, open to all gender of the society.

* In 2013, the National Computer Board organised a Conference with the theme “SMART SME’s: Empowering SME’s through ICT” to trigger the importance of ICT adoption among our non ICT SME’s by creating an online presence; growing their businesses; improving their business processes and becoming more efficient. Hence the conference will increase the demand for broadband and increase the possibility of NCB Technopreneurs to reach new markets. The objectives of the Conference was to create greater awareness among SME’s on the benefits of ICT in enhancing their competitiveness in the new Economy also to learn how ICT can best help SME’s to solve their business challenges for self-empowerment, greater efficiency and sustainable growth and moreover to showcase and promote ICT products and services that is most applicable to the ICT development of SME’s. This Conference had targeted SME’s managed / owned by Women.
* In 2013 the National Computer Board organised the ICT Business IDEA Competition to instil the culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship where some 9 women Team Leaders registered for the Competition and where two of them made it till the semi- finals.
* NCB Technopreneurship Programme team builds the capacity of the Family Support officers of different region of the Island. The theme of the Capacity Building Programme was: **Women & Technology – Bridging the Gender Divide in the IT sector: “How technology can advance Women Economically”.** The Objectives of the Capacity Building Programme was to pprovide them the necessary skills and tools for using technology in their daily life, Strengthen the skills, competencies and abilities of Family Support Officers from different region of the island and to Create an awareness of the importance of technology in the life of women and how technology can aid women in economic development, time management and to reduce poverty.
* However, for the ICT Innovative Business IDEA Competition of 2016, 4 Women Team Leaders registered for the Competition among others and where one Team made it till finals and won the Jury Prize.

**Approaches/ Recommendations**

* To provide special internet access package to SME’s owned and managed by Women
* SME’s can be offered ICT tools to help them in the day to day running of their businesses such as CRM, ERP, Access to Cloud and Digital marketing packages
* To reward women owned/ managed SME’s, Special award or a special category should be included in all competitions or Award organised related to SME’s and Start-ups to promote and encourage more and more women in the digital economy.
* Promote entrepreneurship courses with ICT modules for women
* Enhance formulation of gender responsive business development services
* Promote access of women to specific programs in ICT.

1. **Which are the available sources and mechanism for measuring Women’s participation**

**in the digital economy with focus on SME’s and Micro-Enterprises?**

* Number of Companies or Business Registration card offered to Women SME’s / Enterprises.
* Number of SME’s owned and managed by Women.
* Encourage building of Women owned/ Managed SME’s Communities
* Surveys to evaluate participation
* Formulation of a gender dashboard

1. **What measures/ policies could be envisioned in order to foster the role of Women as**

**entrepreneurs and managers of SME’s, specifically in developing and least developed**

**countries.**

**Measures Proposed**

* Provide special schemes for Women entrepreneurs such as rebate office space, access to internet, and training on how to manage business.
* Set-up nurseries in regions where rebate office space are provided to Women, so as to encourage them to work.
* Promote Entrepreneurship as from Secondary level by laying more emphasis on girls and come up with development of Apps to solve life real problem faced by women in their family and in their community.

**Policies proposed**

* Special SME Financing Schemes for Women Entrepreneurs and SME’s
* Provide Income exemption threshold for Women owned and managed enterprises.
* Empower Women by providing advanced Training in creating Digital Companies.
* Fostering a gender responsive legal framework for making business
* Specific capacity building programs for women
* Access to Capital
* Access to Training
* Access to networks/markets
* Awareness raising programs
* Set up of a public office to foster women’s business development.

1. **What are the gaps in addressing these Challenges? How can they be addressed and**

**what is the role of Governments?**

There are lots of schemes that can be introduced to encourage Women to own / manage SME’s however no specific budget is allocated to cater for these initiatives. Presently, Government is not gender specific when schemes are being introduced, therefore women are not aware about or do not feel ready to take the challenge.

There is the need for more Women representatives at senior managerial level and in policy making/ development of strategies for Women empowered Schemes, initiatives and Award.

Women need to be well represented starting from the parliament to all senior managerial and managerial level. Women should be given chance to lead in these positions as often men feel that these roles and positions are reserved for them and they have tendency not to give the women the chance to decide.

Government should come up with a Gender quota so as to ensure Women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making forums. Government should set specific targets and implement measures to increase the number of women in politics, in senior managerial level, at managerial and decision making level through positive actions.

Legal constraints can be overcome by adjusting legal and regulatory frameworks and a specific Office can be set up by Government to ensure implementation of measures