**Contribution to the October 2017-January 2018 Open Consultation of the ITU CWG-Internet**
October 2017
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**Summary**

The questions posed in this consultation are not about “gender equality”. They are about improving access to the Internet for women and girls: which is a laudable aim but only a part of “gender issues” and gender equality. We provide a link to a web site that provides extensive information on approaches and examples of good practices. We note that many women work in the informal sector, so there often aren’t adequate sources for measuring women’s participation. Measures and policies to foster the role of women include caring for children and the elderly; ICT training; measures to facilitate e-commerce including e-payments, reduction of customs duties, fast, reliable and inexpensive shipments. It is important to integrate ICTs in everyday life. Literacy is a continuing gap and it is important to develop digital literacy. Role models such as Governor General Dame Pearlette Louisy of Saint Lucia (in the Caribbean) are important. And it is important to recognise that in some parts of the world there are emerging concerns regarding marginalised young men and boys.

**Background and Introduction**

On 25 May 2017 Council decided that Open Consultations for the CWG-Internet would be convened on the following issue:

CWG-Internet invites all stakeholders to submit contributions on achieving gender equality for Internet users, focusing on the following questions:

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?

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?

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?

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?

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

**Preliminary comment**

Initially I protest that these questions are not about “gender equality”. They are about improving access to the Internet for women and girls: which is a laudable aim but only a part of “gender issues” and gender equality.

**1. Approaches and examples of good practices to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls**

Numbers 1 and 2 appear to be requiring research results. I found <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/> on a very cursory search, and am aware from the BBC’s “Click” programme of a young woman in the UK, Anne Marie Impafoon, who has begun a programme, Stemette, to encourage girls in the STEM subjects. I don’t have research results. I do have an observation/suggestion. The area which seems to me to need work is women’s attitudes to themselves and their fellows. If women themselves could abandon the perception that they are in some way second rate, then others (men?) would find themselves forced to abandon it too. Women have accepted and appropriated this role of being “second class”, and so it becomes true and is perpetuated. When women claim equality, equality happens.

At the civil society pre-meeting to the IGF in Istanbul I made a similar intervention about civil society’s self-perception. If you see yourself as being lesser, being a victim, being weak, then that is how you will be seen. I used the example of black Americans, compared with black West Indians and black Africans in the United States. If you take for granted that you are equal then you will be equal.

**2. Approaches and examples of good practices to promote the access and use of ICTs by SMEs, in developing and least-developed countries, particularly those owned/managed by women**

See section 1 above.

**3. Available sources and mechanisms for measuring women's participation**

Many women in this part of the world (Caribbean) support themselves and their families in the informal sector as, for example, market vendors and hucksters. This sector is difficult to capture in Labour Market Information Systems (LMIS), and the LMIS itself may not exist.

**4. Measures/policies envisaged to foster the role of women**

Given that an inclusive LMIS is in place then the women themselves should be asked for their input on measures/policies that would be helpful to them. A major issue is always care of babies and children – day care and before/after school care – and increasingly the care of the elderly. This is a big problem that needs an inclusive solution – not just a solution for women whose employment has an ICT connection.

Many of these women travel to buy goods for resale. This expense might be avoided through the use of ICT, given training for the women and a system or systems to aggregate the appropriate information in an accessible manner. The system of customs duties might also need some allowances or adjustments. There also need to be provisions for payment/currency exchange for small amounts of money. A fast, reliable and inexpensive shipping service is also important – in this region this could be policy to encourage the small inter-island boats.

Most importantly “ICT” must not be allowed to become divorced from everyday life. Measures and policies will be needed online AND actual/everyday (how does one refer to the non-ICT world now?) ICT will not solve the problem on its own – it needs to be incorporated as a useful tool and as one among several useful employment possibilities.

**5. How to address gaps and the role of governments**

I’m not sure that the “challenges” have been properly established yet. Nor am I sure that the emphasis on women is appropriate for all parts of the world – here in the Caribbean we are becoming concerned about the marginalised male, and I noted with interest that statistics suggest that also in the UK girls are taking more advantage of opportunities for education than boys are.

Literacy is a continuing gap for everyone – reading and writing are still important skills. Digital literacy – knowing about the online world and how it and its devices function – is a necessary skill. As far as women are concerned I feel, as I stated above, that the most important action must be a change of attitude in themselves about themselves. In countries where religion and culture place women as “second class” it will be important to persuade men that a different attitude is possible, perhaps by encouraging interrogation of what the religion and the culture are REALLY saying about women.

For the role of governments – I’m not a great believer in affirmative action, but governments should examine their behaviour for balance/fair play and set that as a standard which must be adhered to.

Last week, in Saint Lucia, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the appointment of our current Governor General Dame Pearlette Louisy. She is one of the longest serving Governors General in the Commonwealth. She has held office through several general elections (4 or 5) and at least 3 changes of government. She came from a poor family in the fishing village of Laborie, unable to afford secondary schooling until she was awarded a scholarship. She has an earned doctorate as well as several honorary doctorates. She is a very high-achieving human being. Incidentally she is a woman.

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