



INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

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PLENARY MEETING

France Telecom

A BRIEF STATEMENT ON GENDER ISSUES RELATED TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Women in developed countries are coming to new technologies even if access to them has been limited by the lack of money and time. Their relationship with these new technologies is being strongly influenced by their specific needs as women whether they belong to a developed or a developing country. With this brief comment, we will try to understand how technology, telecommunications in particular, fits with these specific needs and in which environment they could be implemented.

- Women are more goal-oriented and focused on practical and useful things. As a result, they consider technologies as a mean to find a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives, a permanent quest which consists in:
 - assuming responsibility for their family and its environment especially children, education and health;
 - getting accessibility to the workforce where they can get a source of income and empower themselves.
- New telecommunications technologies in particular are providing women with new ways to reach these goals:
 - Easy access to more information will gradually give them an increased sense of power and confidence and will contribute to change their role in our society. Access to the Internet is thriving among women in developed countries and service providers are creating targeted on-line services for them.
 - In developed countries, the number of women operating home-based business will increase significantly as more affordable computing and communications products are available on the market. A new population of female managers should emerge from that movement, women who want to go into business for themselves and thus be rewarded according to their real performances.

- Tele-education and telemedicine should be appropriate technologies to be used in developing countries where women have less access to school and health care. For example, women need more information and training to be able to improve their productivity (especially in the agricultural sector) and therefore their revenues and their life environment. Such information could be transmitted through appropriate and basic telecommunication networks. Of course, content should be carefully chosen to fit with their needs. They also need better health care for themselves and their children. Specific health needs such as pregnancy care can be done through teleradiology and telediagnostic.
- Women are committed and eager to participate in the development of their environment. Their participation will guarantee the settling and viability of local projects:
 - Governments have underlined the critical role played by women in the development process and to give them equal access to decision, financing, education and health care circuits. The dynamic will not start without a strong commitment of local authorities.

In fact, a recent survey shows that four factors trigger connections to the Internet: exposure at work, purchase of a PC, access through school and recommendation from a husband, family member or friend. So education, culture and resources are the key issues to create an environment which favours access to new technologies.
 - Access to new technologies should be encouraged and implemented with a female oriented approach which focuses on results. At the same time, equipment and service providers have to adapt their offer to the specific needs of women.
