Input to WSIS
Prepared by
WSIS-Gender Caucus
December 2002
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http:// www.wougnet.org/WSIS/wsisgc.html

Friday December 9, 2002

Dear Mr Gagne Executive Director WSIS
Cc: Mr Utsumi, Secretary General, ITU, WSIS Executive Secretariat

On behalf of the WSIS Gender Caucus, a multi-stakeholder group consisting of representatives of parliaments, national governments, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the United Nations system, we are pleased to provide this contribution to the preparatory process of the WSIS.

The contribution takes as a starting point the importance of aligning the preparatory process and outcomes of WSIS with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The importance of this alignment has been highlighted by the United Nations ICT Task Force.

The WSIS Gender Caucus acknowledges the contribution of the United Nations System in promoting ICT for Development. The Caucus also notes that in parallel there have been efforts to integrate gender equality perspectives into the ICT for development agenda. In particular, the Caucus recognizes the contribution of the ITU Working Group on Gender Issues (WGGI), the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, INSTRAW, ILO, UNIFEM, UNCTAD, UN-ECE and the World Bank. Academic and research organisations and other civil society organisations - in particular women's organisations - have been at the forefront of advocacy efforts that have led to some moderate successes in integrating gender equality issues into ICT for development visions and strategies. We note also that Korea, Canada, Guinea and South Africa have made progress in integrating gender equality considerations into their national ICT policies. Despite these efforts, there have only been modest gains; gender equality issues should not be ignored in preparations for WSIS since there is still considerable room for improvement.

We urge organizers to include sessions that dealt explicitly with gender issues in the official programme and to ensure that women are not underrepresented among panelists and presenters in official plenary and workshop sessions. We have also made specific suggestions on how the principles and themes of the action programme of the Summit should take account of gender equality issues. This contribution also includes recommendations on preparatory activities.

Sincerely,

On behalf of WSIS-Gender Caucus
Gillian Marcelle
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CURRENT SITUATION

There is a wide consensus that information and communication technologies (ICT) can play an important role in reducing poverty, improving education and healthcare, enhancing political participation and empowerment, and promoting sustainable development in developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition. The ICT sector is the central core of the emerging global knowledge-based economy in which access and control of ICT facilities and applications are prerequisites for effective integration into the global economy.

> *The role of ICT as a tool for development has recently attracted the sustained attention of the United Nations. In 2000, the Economic and Social Council adopted a Ministerial Communiqué on the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy. Later that year, the Millennium Declaration underscored the urgency of ensuring that the benefits of new technologies, especially ICT, be available to all. The World Summit on the Information Society, with ITU as lead organizing entity, which takes place in 2003 (Geneva) and 2005 (Tunisia) provides a unique opportunity to advance the ICT for development agenda.*

These positive opportunities are undermined by the prospect that ICT will remain accessible only to the elite and will not contribute to the achievement of fundamental human development. The majority of the world population still lives in poverty and remains untouched by the benefits of ICT. There are critical disparities between and within countries and among groups within countries and regions. One of the most overlooked and ignored disparities is the one that exists between men and women. Unequal power relations in our societies contribute to differential access, participation and treatment for men and women in the Information Society.

These inequalities in access to and control of ICT between men and women limit the potential of an Information Society to make the most valuable contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals MDGs. Without women's participation in decision-making in all spheres of life and at all levels of society, poverty will not be eradicated nor will fully democratic societies be created. Limited access to ICT for women also has the effect of reducing countries' competitiveness in the global market

> **Promoting ICT for development can assist with achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The first goal of the MDGs is to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger." The UN General Assembly recognized that the achievement of this goal depends in part on "good governance at the international level" and also resolved to "ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies . . . are available to all." (UN Millennium Declaration paras. 13 and 20.5 (A/res/55/2)).**

Gender implications

The challenge of gender inequality can be overcome with urgent and concerted actions at the national, regional and international levels to put ICT firmly in the service of development for all. However, this will not happen if ICT decision makers continue to treat gender issues as being non existent or unimportant. In recent months, specifically since the 1st WSIS PrepCom in July 2002, there has been consolidation of evidence on the status of women in the Information Society and development of analysis of strategies for improving this position. WSIS should provide a platform for sharing this information and debating on the best course of action to reduce inequalities and increase opportunities.

The evidence shows that it is important for decision makers and the national and global level to recognise that, in order to formulate an appropriate plan for action to pro-actively target the themes proposed by WSIS, there must be a clear understanding of the issues that impede some sectors of the population to maximize their potential. In doing so, it will be possible to formulate measures to effectively provide access to ICTs for all, to understand the value of ICTs and a tool for economic and social development and to assure confidence and security in the use of ICTs (www.itu.int/osg/spu/wsis-themes/)

Therefore, some of the issues that must be seriously taken into account are:

- Lack of participation of the majority of the people, and particularly women in the developing countries, because of structural and cultural impediments, which significantly reduce the developmental benefits of ICT.
- Uneven and unaffordable access to ICT facilities and services by women, especially but not exclusively, in developing countries. The WSIS has recognized ACCESS as one of the main themes that will be covered by the Summit. Urgent measures are needed to ensure that any policy drawn to provide access, target current and potential problems.
- Inadequate provision of relevant content and applications particularly in local languages and adapted to needs of non-literate women. This point is crucial to address issues under the theme of APPLICATIONS, also recognised by the WSIS as one of the themes to be covered by the Summit. This issue does not only affect women in particular but also the society as a whole. The advantages of producing content and applications in local languages have been widely praised as an important element to provide ACCESS to ICTs and from there, using ICTs as a tool for economic and social development.
- Gender discrimination in labour markets, and in the provision of education and training opportunities and allocation of financial resources for entrepreneurship and business development, also offer negative consequences. This has been highlighted by data provided by organizations such as the Global Alliance for Women in Engineering and Science, which has submitted input to WSIS. As the Global Alliance paper shows, there is a wealth of literature analysing the reasons for the existing low participation rates of women.

Socio-cultural perceptions of women's ability to master Science and Technology (S&T) constitute a hazard for women's advancement in this sector. Issues such as a perceived masculine approach to and image of computer technologies and teaching, curricula design which reinforces gender stereotypes and lack of role models and mentors for women in S&T jeopardise any attempt that women may make to improve their representation in this field. Special attention is needed with regard to the situation of women in developing countries. It is necessary to take into consideration the double obstacles they find in trying to achieve a balance with men and their participation in the field of S&T. No acknowledgement of this situation will endanger any attempt to successfully implement policies in this area.

- Under-representation of women in all aspects of decision-making in operations, policy and regulation in the ICT.

The convening of a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) by the United Nations system provides a unique opportunity to focus global attention on these issues. In making preparations for the Summit, the organisers are urged to take the opportunity to ensure that WSIS provides an opportunity for women and men to enjoy the myriad potentials for social and economic empowerment offered by ICT and to participate effectively in all aspects of the ICT field. WSIS can assist in building an Information Society that contributes to promoting gender equality as well as furthering progress in eradication of poverty, promotion of peace and security and the enjoyment of human rights. All stakeholders must take urgent action to ensure that gender equality and women's rights are integrated into the WSIS and its follow-up programmes. Unless these actions are taken, there is a grave risk that the Summit will not succeed in its aim of creating a vision of the Information Society that contributes to human development.

The recently held Pan-European Preparatory Ministerial Conference for WSIS (7-9 November, Bucharest) could serve as best practice in including a gender perspective into WSIS process. The Round Table on "Building a Gender-Sensitive Information Society" was an integral part of the Conference. Its conclusions were presented at the closing plenary session and reflected in the Bucharest Declaration, which included principles, strategy and priorities for action. They were also included into the final report from the Conference. The relevant sentence from the final report from the Bucharest Conference reads as follows: "*Governments and other stakeholders should provide the necessary conditions to ensure women's equal access to information and knowledge as well as ensuring their equal role as producers and decision makers in all aspects related to the shaping of IT policies and frameworks*". (www.itu.int/wsis/events/bucharest.html)

PLATFORM FOR ACTION

The WSIS Gender Caucus urges the WSIS organizers to include in the Declaration that defines the desired characteristics and goals of the Information Society and the Plan of Action for achieving these goals, substantive consideration of gender equality issues.

The WSIS Declaration should prioritize access to the opportunities represented by ICT for all of the world's citizens, with particular emphasis on those that are disadvantaged and marginalized. The WSIS Plan of Action should outline concrete steps for ensuring equitable and inclusive access to participation in the World Information Society.

Accordingly, the WSIS Gender Caucus urges decision-makers involved in planning the Summit, its outcomes and follow-up programmes to focus on reinforcing the contribution of ICT for realization of the MDGs by taking the following actions:

Preparatory processes

1. Include gender perspectives in every facet of the Summit - from policy and planning to action, monitoring and evaluation, and also include targets for the participation of women;
2. Ensure active participation of gender equality advocates in the preparatory process of the WSIS and the Summit itself to ensure that global ICT policy integrates gender equality goals;
3. Include women as leaders and decision-makers in all planning processes for the Summit;
4. Facilitate and encourage participation of women as members of national delegations and representatives of civil society and business by setting targets for delegations to include at least 30 percent women including gender and ICT experts;
5. Implement an information dissemination campaign that includes a wide range of media such as radio, drama and print, and in a variety of languages, on ICT as a tool for the empowerment of women;
6. Commission a study on the interaction between gender equality and ICT, which should include development of a gender equality and ICT baseline, indicators, conceptual tools and case studies on the impact of ICT on achieving gender equality, to inform the dialogue of the Summit.

WSIS Declaration

- Include principles in the WSIS Declaration to establish that:

o Information and communication technologies have an important role to play in promoting human development, eradicating poverty and promoting gender equality;

o The benefits of information and communication technologies should be available to all, as recognized in the UN Millennium Declaration and should be promoted through recognition of a Universal Right to Communicate within the international human rights framework. The women's human rights community can serve as a key partner in the development and protection of these rights.

Plan of Action

- Develop specific criteria in the WSIS Plan of Action to include, for example:

o Programmes to reform decision-making processes in the telecommunications and ICT sector to ensure good governance, greater accountability to all stakeholders and to improve the participation and representation of women and gender equality advocates in all levels of policy making including participation across generations. These programmes should also develop monitoring mechanisms at all levels in the telecommunications and ICT sector to assess the extent of women's greater access and control over resources necessary for their empowerment and to deliver support for capacity building and training that facilitates wide participation by women and gender ICT specialists in policy and decision making;

o Programmes that facilitate women's active participation in the telecommunications and ICT sector through implementing projects that encourage and support entrepreneurship and women's employment, including women's access to international markets;

o Programmes that specifically involve maximizing ICT contribution to the goals of peace, equality and development by developing and encouraging innovative ICT applications that aim to reduce poverty, eliminate HIV/AIDS, promote conflict resolution and peace building, support women's reproductive and productive roles, facilitate education and literacy and reducing violence against women.

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DOCUMENTS ENDORSED

1. Input to WSIS from the UN ICT Task Force; which focuses on the importance of aligning WSIS with the MDGs
2. Civil Society Coordinating Group input to Global PrepCom 2
3. Increasing the Participation of Women in Computer Science and Engineering (CSE): Recommendations to the World Summit on the Information Society by the UNCSTD Gender Advisory Board GAB and the Global Alliance for Women in Engineering and Science.
4. Recommendations of the report of the UN-DAW Expert Group Meetings on media and ICTs for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.
5. Bucharest Declaration from European Regional PrepCom. www.itu.int/wsis/evetns/bucharest.html
6. Recommendations of the APC African Civil Society workshop on ICT Policy, Addis Ababa, Nov 6-10, 2002 http://africa.rights.apc.org/workshop_dec_eng.shtml
7. KNOWHOW Conference Declaration, July 2002 http://www.isis.or.ug/knowhow/kdeclaration.html

8. WSIS-Gender Caucus Statement at First Regional PrepCom Bamako
    http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/wsisgc.html
9. WSIS-Gender Caucus Statement at PrepCom I
    http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/wsisgc.html

SELECTED RESOURCES

1. Marcelle, G. (2002) Information and Communication Technologies and their
    impact on its use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of
    women. Report of the on-line conference organised by UNDAW 17 June- 19 July
    2002.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/Report-online.PDF

2. Background papers and report of the Expert Group Meeting on Information and
    Communication Technologies and their impact on its use as an instrument for the
    advancement and empowerment of women, organised by UN-DAW, ITU and the
    UN ICT Task Force.
    http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/

3. World Bank: Gender and the Digital Divide Resource Center
    http://www.worldbank.org/gender/digitaldivide/digitaldividelinks.htm

4. Korean Ministry of Gender Equality plans and programmes for women's
    informatization (2002-2006) and bridging the gender digital divide can be found
    at http://apwin.women.or.kr