UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING

TOPIC.

DIGITAL INCLUSION: ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF RURAL WOMEN.

BY

Dr. Ifeyinwa Ofong, National Coordinator

Women in Development and Environment: WorldWIDE Network Nigeria.

Board Member, Habitat International Coalition.

INTRODUCTION

- This year 2020, marks five years since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets

- While progress to achieve these goals and their targets has been slow, the advent of the COVID -19 pandemic, which took the world by storm has pushed back the little progress made so far.

- The pandemic has increased poverty and the rate of violence against women and girls.

- It also brought to bear the existing digital divides in terms of unequal access and affordability of digital infrastructure and ICTs, particularly as its affects women.

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT
AND ENVIRONMENT
WorldWIDE Network: Nigeria

WHY DIGITAL INCLUSION?

- Digital inclusion means that everyone in our society has what they need to access and use the internet, and other digital technologies.

- If we must accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and ensure that no one is left behind, it is key that women particularly those in rural areas are well included in the design and application of digital technology.

DIGITAL EXCLUSION OF RURAL WOMEN.

- Rural women generally are underrepresented in fields such as computer science, mathematics and engineering which shape the design of technologies.

- They have also been associated with low internet use and lack of interest in technology. They access the internet less frequently than men.

- The mobile and digital technologies can offer rural women the potential to bypass some of the traditional, cultural and mobility barriers particularly for those in the developing countries.

- Digital technologies in addition can help rural women to access new markets, interact with customers and access finance for their ventures.

Curtsey: DW.

GAPS AND PRIORITY AREAS IN DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR RURAL WOMEN.

1. DIGITAL ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- One major gap in digital inclusion is lack of digital access and infrastructure, particularly in developing countries and for women living in remote and rural areas.

- This is in spite of SDGs 9.5c target that says; there should be a significant increase in access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

Curtesy: Annie Spratt.

2. AFFORDABILITY OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES.

- Many rural women live in poverty.

- The cost of acquiring and maintaining digital technologies for themselves and their children is way out of their reach.

- Though some can manage to buy cheap cell phone, many rural women are not able to afford mobile data or connect to broadband or Wi-Fi in other to be connected to the internet.

Curtesy: IEEE SPECTRUM

3. DIGITAL SKILLS AND LITERACY

- Basic and digital literacy is required to be able to operate digital technology.

- With the low literacy rate for many rural women in developing countries, they lack the necessary capacity and digital skills to operate digital technologies.

CURTESY:BGR. INDIA.

4. DIGITAL INTEREST AND MOTIVATION.

- A woman can still be digitally excluded even though she has digital skills, access and can afford it.

- The skills may not guarantee that she will adopt and fully participate in the digital realm, as she may lack the interest, motivation or social acceptance to engage with ICTs.

- In addition, the content and services she wants to use, may actually not be designed in a way that works for her.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.

- In order to proffer good policies and digital inclusion initiatives, we need first to understand the digital needs of rural women, as well as challenge and eliminate those policies or actions that deepen their digital exclusion.

- In general, policies aiming for digital inclusion of rural women, must provide universal, affordable and secure access to digital technology for them.

- In formulating policies for their digital inclusion, we need to take cognizance of the SDGs 5.5b target, which talks about *enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.*

- Such policies should assist rural women to complement their social skills with training and contribute to digital technological spaces, so that technological innovations will be designed with their needs in mind.

- Policies and Initiatives to increase funding for investment in ICT infrastructure, training, awareness raising, and access to digital technologies for rural women are strongly recommended.

- This can also be achieved through the establishment of women information and computer service centers with full internet services in rural communities.

CONCLUSIONS.

- There should be a clear and cohesive understanding of what digital inclusion of rural women will look like, a road map on how to get there, measures and supporting data to show progress and milestones achieved.

- We also need to set key priorities and know where the gaps are, so intervention can be directed to where it is needed.

- Finally, let me emphasize the importance of having agreed measures for digital inclusion as well as a reliable, comprehensive data that will provide a full picture of who is or not digitally included.

Digital inclusion can empower rural women and also create access to new markets for their products.

THANK YOU