DIVISION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO THE MEDIA AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Introduction

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 recognized that information and communication technologies (ICT) and the media created new opportunities for women, yet also reinforced gender-based barriers and inequalities. The United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) has addressed the gender dimensions of ICT in its various activities, including research/analysis and national capacity building.

Consideration of women and ICT at CSW

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) undertook a comprehensive analysis of the role of ICT and the media in achieving gender equality at its 47th session in March 2003.

The report of the Secretary-General to the 47th session of the CSW on "Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women" summarized efforts of the UN system in this area. It also provided recommendations for consideration by the CSW, highlighting the importance of a gender-sensitive enabling environment, the promotion of women's participation and employment in the information society, the need to mobilize resources to promote gender equality in the media and ICT, and the inclusiveness and participation of women in the information society.[1]

An interactive expert panel on gender equality and ICT and the media was held during the 47th session of the CSW.[2] The dialogue highlighted the following issues:

- Women's rights in the information society
- Women's portrayal in the media
- The need to clarify women's information needs and to address questions of content
- The importance of traditional media and technologies
- Gender-based discrimination and inequalities in access to opportunities in the emerging knowledge and information society
- Women's access to employment in the media and ICT, especially at decision-making levels.

The Commission adopted agreed conclusions at its 47th session that emphasized the need to prevent and combat the negative impact of the digital revolution on gender equality, and enhance the role of ICT and the media for women's empowerment and gender equality. The Commission also agreed on a series of actions addressed to different ICT and media stakeholders, including the following[3]:

- Remove ICT-related infrastructural barriers that disproportionately affect women and girls and establish affordable and accessible ICT-related infrastructure
- Make women's and girls' education and training in ICT-related fields a priority for the development of ICT and part of the education curricula
- Enable equal access for women to ICT-based economic activities and employment
- Combat the negative or stereotyped portrayal of women and the criminal misuse of ICT for sexual exploitation and trafficking in women and girls

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[1] The complete Secretary-General report is available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw47/documents.html#ecn66

[2] The moderator's summary of the discussion is available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw47/CRP5.PDF

[3] The Report of the 47th session is available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw47/documents.html#report47

- Increase efforts to compile statistics disaggregated by sex and age and to develop gender-specific indicators on ICT use and needs
- Encourage partnerships to build women's capacity for participation, including in decision-making at all levels in ICT and the media and in e-governance
- Strengthen the capacity of national machineries as advocates for integrating gender perspectives into ICT and the media
- Provide adequate and appropriate resources for innovative, affordable, accessible and sustainable media and ICT programmes, projects and products that support gender equality.

These agreed conclusions were sent to organizers for consideration during the preparations and at the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS 2003) in Geneva.

Inputs from expert group meetings and online discussions

DAW, in collaboration with other United Nations entities, organized two Expert Group Meetings in 2002 on the themes: "women and the media" and "women and ICT". The reports of the two meetings[4] were made available during the 47th session of CSW.

DAW also organized two online discussions in 2002 to collect a wide range of views and experiences from practitioners in ICT and the media. More than 200 participants shared their insights, experiences and success stories where ICT and the media had been used as tools to promote gender equality.[5]

Capacity building for national machineries

DAW, in collaboration with ECA and ESCWA, organized five workshops on "Strengthening the capacity of national machineries through the effective use of ICTs" in Africa and West Asia: Windhoek, Namibia (19-23 April 2004); Dakar, Senegal (24-28 May 2004), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (10-14 January and 23-27 May 2005) and Beirut, Lebanon (27 June-1 July 2005). The workshops aimed to support national machineries in effective use of ICT for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. In a regional meeting (Addis Ababa, 27-30 September 2005), discussions were held on the establishment of a regional e-based network for national machineries, and the development of a framework for future actions for the effective use of ICT. Participants endorsed a declaration on gender and ICT.

Panel discussion at WSIS in Tunis

DAW is organizing a panel discussion on "Enhancing the capacity of national machineries through the effective use of information and communication technology" in Tunis. Building on the experience gained from the technical cooperation workshops and the regional meeting, the panel will encourage the development of an e-based regional network, and will further promote gender equality through the effective use of ICT, as outlined in the WSIS Declaration of Principles.

WomenWatch

DAW is the Task Manager for WomenWatch[6], a gateway to information and resources on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women throughout the UN system. DAW created a special feature, "Gender & ICT", on the website. WomenWatch will be showcased during the WSIS at Tunis.

Rural women and ICT

The Secretary-General's report on "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas"[7] recommended, *inter alia*, that the WSIS address the needs of rural women, including resources to access and use ICTs effectively, and rural women's participation in ICT activities at the national and local levels.

Women2000 and Beyond –Gender equality and the empowerment of women through ICT

This publication[8] explores the gender dimensions of ICT, the potential for women's empowerment through ICT and strategies to address the gender digital divide. It covers issues of access, utilization, content and employment. It also provides examples of good practice from around the world.

[4] http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/EGMFinalReport.PDF and http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/EGMFinalReport.pdf
[5] The summary of the discussions are available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/BP2Mavic.PDF and http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/Report-online.PDF

[6] http://www.un.org/womenwatch
[7] The full report is available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga60.htm#ga60165
[8] Advance copy is available: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/w2000-09.05-ict-e.pdf