

Inter-Agency Network on  
Women and Gender Equality  
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# **World Summit on the Information Society: We are all concerned**

**Task Manager: ITU**

**IANWGE Task Force on Gender and ICTs****World Summit on the Information Society: We are all concerned**

1. In the words of the General Assembly there is an “urgent need to harness the potential of knowledge and technology for promoting the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration “ (General Assembly Res. 56/183, preambular para.1).The General Assembly has thus pointed to the link between the Information Society on one side and Poverty Reduction and the Millennium goals on the other. All organizations of the UN family are concerned with the all important Millennium goals related to the areas of responsibility assigned to them. Gender mainstreaming in most of these areas has already been fully recognized as priority action in the Beijing Platform for Action and Beijing + 5.
2. In addition to recognizing the central role and the importance of developing a common vision and understanding of the Information Society, taking into account the current globalization trends in the world of today, the General Assembly stressed “the need, at the highest political level, to marshal the global consensus and commitment required to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development so as to reap the full benefits of the information and communication technologies revolution, and to address the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society” (General Assembly Res. 56/183, preambular para. 3).
3. While considering the preparatory process for the WSIS and the proposed themes which are being developed to serve as the basis on which the Declaration and Plan of Action will be drawn up and negotiated, it has become abundantly clear that little or no consideration has been paid to a gender perspective in the preparatory process and the expected outcomes of the Summit. In fact, as of today the word “gender” appears nowhere in the briefing material so far published on the WSIS.
4. The preparatory process involves all Governments and all representatives of civil society, such as NGOs and the private sector. The preparatory process is being facilitated by the international organizations participating in the High-Level Organizing Committee (HLSOC) created by the ACC plus all other organizations interested in and affected by the Information Society. It provides ample opportunity to bring to the fore the gender aspects of the Information Society, both in the preparatory meetings themselves (PrepComs at the global level and regional meetings at the regional level) and in advocacy within our organizations to sensitize the Management to the fact that the Information Society is intimately linked to the mandates of all of the UN organizations and that participation in the overall preparations for the WSIS will benefit not only the WSIS itself but also the individual organizations in their own programmes of work.
5. The themes being developed for the Summit are of concern to all organizations of the UN. They include elements from all sectors of society, elements that concern all citizens, men and women, of the world and they will be important elements in developing the common vision and understanding of the Information Society called for by the General Assembly. In this respect, it is of utmost importance that a human dimension be included in the themes and that this human dimension be the foundation for the Declaration and Plan of Action to be adopted by the Summit.
6. It is obvious that if the human dimension, which must explicitly include a gender dimension, is not at the center of the deliberations and outcome of the Summit, a very important opportunity to profoundly influence the development of the human society in the next decades will have been missed. It is also obvious that we must avoid adding gender issues to already agreed text, as has all too often been the case. All efforts must be made to really mainstream gender in all the themes, discussions and negotiations leading to the outcome of the Summit.

7. As pointed out by a number of representatives of civil society, it is high time to officially sanction "Communication as a Human Right in the Information Society". This goes back some time both within ECOSOC and the Human Rights Commission. The concept is widely accepted and has potentially profound influence particularly on women as the most disadvantaged group in terms of access to communication. It should encompass consideration of the means to communicate as well as what is communicated as pointed out as far back as the Beijing Platform for Action.
8. The work of IANWGE could focus on the following guiding principles which underlie the work on gender mainstreaming in many other areas of the society today, namely study
  - 1) How ICTs impact men and women. This would include a study of the many ways in which men and women are affected by the rapid development of ICTs, such as digital divide, language barriers, globalization through development of ICTs, questions of access, rural/urban divide. It could also include the development of gender sensitive indicators and the collection of specific sex disaggregated statistics in various sectors of the economy, in particular telecommunications and ICTs, as well as Internet use/access.
  - 2) How gender issues impact ICTs or how they have not so far impacted ICTs. This would primarily concentrate on policy and regulatory issues and might also include questions of standardization. It could also include issues of content, needs assessments and possible responses and
  - 3) How ICTs impact our society in general. This part would explore the wider impact of ICTs in general to try to piece together an image of the changes that have occurred in the world based on the explosion of ICTs in recent years and a projection towards the future if the trend continues without a specific gender perspective and with a gender perspective. This touches on issues of ethics and crime, globalization and marginalization, digital divide and development gap, information have's and information have not's, etc. It would also explore new partnerships for inclusion of ICTs in the development process.
9. The work will be part of the efforts undertaken by the UN system and its partners in implementing already existing agreements reflected in Beijing + 5 and the Millennium Declaration in particular.

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