

Inter-Agency Network on  
Women and Gender Equality  
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# **Gender and information and communication technologies**

**Task Manager: ITU**

## **Introduction**

The main concern of the Task Force has been to coordinate the input into the WSIS process from the various members of the Task Force as well as other members of the Network.

## **Activities**

**1.1** A special session on WSIS was held on 14 June 2002 in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Working Group on Gender Issues(WGGI). The work of the IANWGE Task Force and its proposals were presented. Several Geneva based representatives from IANWGE were present as well as a UNIFEM representative from Africa. The Session approved a Recommendation on including gender into the WSIS process and decided to establish a WGGI/WSIS Coordination Committee to coordinate and promote WGGI's input into the preparatory process for WSIS.

**1.2** A main event was the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for WSIS which was held during the first week of July, i.e. 1 to 5 July 2002 in Geneva. Of major importance was:

- statements from Angela King as Chairperson of IANWGE [http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/pc1/statements\\_general/advancement\\_women.doc](http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/pc1/statements_general/advancement_women.doc) and UNIFEM during plenary sessions of the PrepCom [http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/pc1/statements\\_general/unifem.doc](http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/pc1/statements_general/unifem.doc)
- a debate in the form of a noontime dialog on Opportunities and Obstacles for Women and Men in the Digital Revolution, organized on the second day of the PrepCom with the active participation from a number of the members of the Task Force. A number of representatives from Member States, NGOs and private sector assisted at the event.

**1.3** Further efforts were made to include gender considerations into the Regional Preparatory Conferences, first in Bamako at the end of May 2002 <http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/genderstatement.html> and second in Bucharest in November 2002 [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0005!!MSW-E.doc](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0005!!MSW-E.doc) both of which were organized in cooperation with the Regional Commissions responsible for the area and with the active participation of members of IANWGE.

**1.4** A real breakthrough on ensuring the inclusion of gender in the WSIS preparatory process was made during the Bucharest meeting where a Round Table on Building a Gender Sensitive Information Society [http://www.genderit.org/wsis/wsis\\_europe\\_unifem.doc](http://www.genderit.org/wsis/wsis_europe_unifem.doc) was included in the official

programme of the meeting itself and the outcome document included specific reference to women and ICTs.

**1.5** The Geneva based Gender Focal Points met to share information on the activities being carried out in each organization and to discuss important links and strategies to maintain the awareness and momentum in the respective organizations.

**1.6** The Asia-Pacific Regional Conference held in Tokyo 13- 15 January 2003 [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0006!!MSW-E.doc](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0006!!MSW-E.doc) endorsed the important role that ICTs can play in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which describe a fundamental set of principles and guidelines for combating hunger, poverty, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality. The final declaration mentions: “Gender issues: Unequal power relations and other social and cultural aspects have contributed to differential access, participation and status for men and women in the region. In this regard, more attention should be given to overcoming these constraints and ensuring that women can equally benefit from the increased use of ICTs for empowerment and full participation in shaping political, economic and social development “.

A Panel session on Gender also adopted a statement at the Asia-Pacific Gender Forum for WSIS held on 12 January 2003.

**1.7** The WSIS Latin American and the Caribbean Regional Conference [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0007!!PDF-E.pdf](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0007!!PDF-E.pdf) was held in Bavaro, Punta Cana (Dominican Republic), from 29 - 31 January 2003. The Declaration does not specifically mention gender but underlines the universal nature of all aspects of the Information Society.

**1.8** The Western Asia Preparatory Conference which took place in Beirut, Lebanon, [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0008!!MSW-E.doc](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/doc/S03-WSISPC2-DOC-0008!!MSW-E.doc) also adopted a Declaration of Principles. In this Declaration women are mentioned several times, notably in the context of concern about the low rate of participation and lack of job opportunities in the regional labour market, and the objective of emphasizing the needs of, among the others, women in the transition towards an information society.

**1.9** The next meeting for the WSIS preparations will be PrepCom 2 to be held in Geneva from 17 to 28 February 2003. This will be followed by PrepCom 3 tentatively scheduled from 15 - 26 September 2003 and the Summit from 10 - 12 December 2003.

## **Recommendations**

**2.1** Although the Task Force did not meet physically during the year, the Task Manager of the Gender and ICTs Task Force endeavoured to ensure that gender inputs were integrated into the many activities undertaken within the framework of the WISI preparations. However, because of the increasing number of events and activities, it has become necessary to review the involvement of ITU in the Task Force as well as make recommendations for the future of the work carried out within the framework of the Task Force.

**2.2** In particular, it is felt very strongly that because of the momentum which the WSIS preparations have generated in all regions and with the involvement of most of the Organizations of the UN family that there may not be a need for a formal task force to continue to work in this area. The proposal would be to report directly back to IANWGE on the various activities undertaken by individual organizations and Gender Focal Points in this respect while ITU would still serve as a back-up and support for such activities in the run-up to phase one of the Summit.

**2.3** It is therefore recommended to disband the Task Force at this point on the understanding that work concerning WSIS will continue and that ITU will work as facilitator for all proposals dealing with inputs into the WSIS process.

**2.4** If the Task Force is disbanded as recommended, it may be necessary to look at the possibility of creating a small Working Group to contribute to a publication on the work of each organization in Gender and ICT's with the working title "Aspects of the Information Society from a Gender Perspective" as was proposed at the IANWGE meeting in 2002. Since there is still no decision as to the framework within which the Declaration and Plan of Action to be adopted by WSIS in December 2003 it is very difficult at this point in time to make a judgment on what would be relevant to the WSIS process in such a publication. Consideration should therefore be given to whether or not it is feasible to prepare a solid input in view of the timeframe within which this would have to be done.

**2.5** On the other hand the possibility of preparing fact sheets on each theme of WSIS after they have been adopted hopefully at the session of PrepCom 2 still remains a very strong possibility and the offer by DPI to assist ITU in this respect is important and should be reconfirmed. Once the themes have been agreed it is proposed that those organizations who have expertise in the various issues should take the lead in the preparation of a fact sheet of relevant to their own organization which could then be coordinated by ITU in cooperation with DPI.

**2.6** Finally, it is suggested to request INSTRAW/GAINS to consider whether or not they would be able to take over the compilation and updating of the Compendium of

Projects of Gender and ICT's which was started by ITU and submitted to IANWGE at its 2002 meeting. It would seem that under the present financial restrictions applying to ITU, it would not be possible for ITU to continue this work. Therefore, if it is considered of interest and importance to the members of IANWGE a different method of handling this would therefore have to be found.

### **Conclusion**

The work initiated by the IANWGE Task Force on Gender and ICT to ensure that a gender perspective be included in the WSIS process has gone well beyond the reach of the Task Force to many other concerned regional and international organizations, NGOs and Civil Society. The momentum has generated a life of its own and become much too encompassing to be limited to the Task Force. This is one more reason, to recommend that the Task Force as such be terminated and that each Member of IANWGE continue its involvement in the WSIS process with its own constituency. It is suggested that the Gender Focal Points of each organization report back to IANWGE at its annual meetings on any further activities and progress made. The Recommendations contained in the 2002 Report may be further discussed at the IANWGE Meeting in February and a mechanism established to coordinate inputs at Inter-Agency level.

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