

Special Joint Meeting of the Second and Third Committees of the UNGA: “Communication for Development: Using ICT and Broadband to Accelerate Social and Economic Development”

Monday, 12 November 2012, 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Venue: ECOSOC Chamber, NLB

I. Introduction

Communication for Development (C4D) plays an important role in development efforts in agriculture, health, governance, environmental sustainability, education and many other sectors. Amongst the many channels for communication, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), mainly cell phones and the Internet, are as much a part of today’s social and economic fabric as radio and television were in the 20th Century. The economic and social implications of equal access to broadband and use of ICTs, ensuring focus on girls and women, are demonstrated by several trends.¹

- A growing body of evidence suggests that broadband can boost GDP and income, helping combat poverty and hunger. Research by the World Bank suggests that a 10% increase in broadband penetration could boost GDP by 1.38% in low and middle-income countries.²
- The ICT sector is a growing sector for employment, and a key economic factor underpinning both national and international development. This growth in employment, however, has not yet led to a parallel increase in jobs for women in the ICT labour market, with a female to male ratio being particularly pronounced at senior levels.
- The lack of trained female professionals means that in OECD countries, women now account for less than 20 per cent of ICT specialists, that most developed countries are forecasting an alarming shortfall in the number of skilled staff to fill upcoming ICT jobs. The European Union calculates that in ten years’ time there will be 700,000 more ICT jobs than there are professionals to fill them; globally, that shortfall is estimated to be closer to two million.

To examine implications for social and economic development of the use of ICTs by individuals and by groups, including organizations, academic institutions, the private sector and governments, a joint meeting of the Second Committee and Third Committee will be held on 12 November 2012, during the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly. This Joint Meeting is linked to the presentation of the Secretary General’s Note on communication for development programmes in the United Nations system, A/67/207.

¹ The section refers to data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) report: *A Bright Future in ICTs—Opportunities for a new generation of women* (Geneva, 2012).

² The State of Broadband 2012: Achieving Digital Inclusion for All. A Report by the Broadband Commission September 2012 (p. 23)

II. Overall Purpose

The purpose of this event is to sensitize members of the Second and Third Committees to the transformative role of broadband and ICTs in achieving social change. The event offers an opportunity to deepen the discourse on minimizing and eventually eliminating the digital divide in access to broadband connectivity and to new and ever-evolving ICTs. It will address issues of accessibility, affordability, digital literacy, and policy design. By accessibility, it is meant by all persons, including those with disabilities, girls and women, and marginalized groups such as ethnic and indigenous minorities.

Closing the gap remains a formidable task for realizing the Millennium Development Goals, including MDG 3, which calls for gender equality. For instance, while the gender gap in access to mobile telephony is relatively small, women in sub-Saharan Africa are 24 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile phone and 37 per cent less likely in South Asia.

These differences are much higher in access to and use of Internet-based technologies, and even more acute by socio-economic strata and geographical location. Resolution A/RES/66/184³ "Information and communication technologies for development" calls on all stakeholders to aim for the full participation in and access of women and girls to information and communication technologies. Bridging these differences, through measures such as increased broadband connectivity and availability of ICTs, would allow more than 300 million women to have access to and use a mobile telephone.

III. Structure of the Informal Meeting

The Joint Meeting will be co-chaired by the Second and Third Committee Chairs. It will be an interactive discussion with specific issues to be addressed by each panellist, and will be facilitated by a moderator.

The Chairs will make opening remarks and set the tone of the event, followed by an introductory statement by Mr. Martin Mogwanja, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director. The Chairs will give the floor to the Moderator, who will introduce the Panellists and invite them to make their statements.

During the interactive debate, the Moderator will invite representatives of Member States to provide comments and pose questions to the panel. This will be interspersed with the Moderator's invitation to a number of pre-determined Lead Discussants to respond/deliver comments on the presentations. Finally, the Moderator will provide a brief summary of the discussion. The Chairs of the Committees will then formally close the meeting.

A Chairman's summary of the Informal Meeting will be made available and disseminated through various communication and media outlets.

³<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/469/86/PDF/N1146986.pdf?OpenElement>