ORGANISATION DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'EDUCATION, LA SCIENCE, ET LA CULTURE

UNESCO

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION

GENDER AND THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

BACKGROUND

Information and communication have become major issues for most of the peoples and nations of our planet as they, among others, contribute to the construction of a more just society with stronger ties of solidarity. The capacity of nations to generate knowledge through scientific research and cultural production, to transmit it by means of formal, informal, initial or continuing education, and to share it through the media and information systems varies considerably from one country to another. The widening digital divide combined with the developmental gap has given rise to new forms of exclusion and marginalization. In the new context of globalisation, access to information resources, freedom of expression, the participation of citizens as actors in civil society, the preservation of cultural diversity, the availability of public service broadcasting side by side with growing private ownership of communication and information industries, the lack of adequate financial and material resources for the development of the media in many developing countries, and the very objectives of the knowledge society are all challenges whose broad scope cannot be ignored. Beyond the technical aspects, the real challenge is to take account of the human dimension of the digital divide. In this respect education becomes a priority, as there can be no information for all without education for all.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN UNESCO STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

UNESCO takes a broad approach to gender mainstreaming. The *Section for Women and Gender Equality*, located within the Bureau of Strategic Planning, is responsible for the overall integration of gender equality issues within UNESCO's five Major Programmes (i.e. Education, Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Communication and Culture) two cross-cutting

themes ("Eradication of Poverty" and "The contribution of information and communication technologies to the development of education, science, culture and the construction of a knowledge society"), and thematic areas of focus such as HIV and AIDS. In particular, the Section has the following functions:

• Provides policy implementation guidance for gender mainstreaming in UNESCO (HQ and FO);

• Forges, within UNESCO, its Member States and at a regional and global levels, political commitment to gender equality, women's empowerment and women's and girls' human rights;

• Reinforces and monitors gender mainstreaming in UNESCO's programmes;

• Supports capacity-building in UNESCO and Member States, particularly by developing holistic and multi-disciplinary approaches to gender issues;

• Develops co-operation and establishes partnerships with other UN entities, international and regional IGOs, major international NGOs, private foundations and private sector partners;

• Promotes gender equality within UNESCO's Secretariat. The Section edited a series of documents, such as the *UNESCO Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework,* the *Practical Handbook for Gender Focal Points in the National Commissions for UNESCO* and the brochure *UNESCO Mainstreaming: the Needs of Women*.

The *Education Sector* is striving to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and to achieve gender equality in education by 2015. Women and girls are one of the key target groups in UNESCO's endeavour to eliminate all forms of discrimination in education. The *Science Sector* focuses on the integration of gender perspectives in national science and technology policies and programmes to ensure that women and girls can take full part in all aspects of science,

technology and engineering sciences, and that their priorities and visions are reflected in development goals. The *Social and Human Sciences Sector* seeks to promote gender equality and women's human rights through knowledge sharing, research and analysis of the socio-economic issues and structures. Based on research, it seeks to promote gender equality as a means for development. The *Culture Sector* provides support to Member States and NGOs to sustain initiatives devoted to strengthening the contribution of women and the roles they play in sustaining cultural identity. The *Information and Communication Sector* has three principal strategic objectives: (i) promoting the free flow of ideas and universal access to information, (ii) promoting the expression of pluralism and cultural diversity in the media and world information networks and (iii) promoting access for all to ICTs.

UNESCO's CONTRIBUTIONS
One of UNESCO's fundamental tasks is to promote the free flow of ideas and universal access to information and to contribute to the strengthening of communication and information capacities so as to empower communities and citizens and to enable them to participate effectively in the democratic process. Part of this mission is also to encourage the creation of diverse contents.

Examples of UNESCO's contribution includes:
1. Education: The gateway to equality and change
Women's Literacy and Basic Skills Training: This project typifies UNESCO's approach to non-formal education. It uses community learning centres set up in villages of ethnic rural minorities in the Lao People's Republic to attract women and girls to basic education. By creating an immediate link between the learning process and improved economic conditions through the sale of products (from marketing gardening, animal husbandry, sewing), the project encourages village women to become numerate and literate.

Multi-channel Learning for Women-Farmers: A four-year project in China, Pakistan, and Indonesia uses radio, print materials and group activities to bring technology, literacy, and knowledge to rural women to ease their load, and endeavours to contribute efficiently to the fight against "feminisation of poverty."

Building-up women's capacities: Women statisticians in Francophone and Anglophone African have participated in workshops to acquire skills and techniques for analysis of gender disparities is education and literacy, raise awareness of the importance of gender-sensitive

indicators, and to promote regional cooperation in the collection or dissemination of gender-sensitive education statistics and indicators.

2. Empowerment though communication and networking
The gender divide is one of the most significant inequalities reflected within the digital divide that cuts across all social and income groups. Through the Programme on Women in the Media, the empowerment of women through the media and greater access to ICTs is actively promoted to ensure a wider impact on their intellectual and personal growth and status. To redress gender imbalance and reduce existing inequalities, UNESCO is running a series of projects for women and girls. These include:

To strengthen local communication networks and improve access to information and knowledge of women in rural areas, UNESCO has helped develop a number of potential models to address the issue of rural women's marginalization through innovative uses of ICTs. The Nabanna information network, one of the nine projects established in India, West Bengal, seeks to provide poor women with access to information in Bengali (the local language), which allows them to discuss and exchange their experience with other women trough off-line group activities. The project uses grassroots processes to build information–sharing networks among low-income, rural women. Focus areas include agriculture, environment, health, sanitation, family planning, education, literacy and law.

To improve media coverage of gender issues in Tajikistan and to raise awareness of women's rights and gender equality issues as part of democratic society, UNESCO enhanced the skills of 24 women journalists working for local radio stations, television and print media in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan by promoting international best practise in covering women's issues and by offering local journalists exposure to outside experience.

UNESCO's international initiative "Women Make the News" is another annually implemented project that seeks to empower women around the world by entrusting editorial responsibility to women in the media on March 8, the International Women's Day.

UNESCO designed the project "Professional & Career Development of Arab Women Journalists" jointly with the UNDP/ICTDAR as a concrete follow-up to the UNESCO annual initiative "Women Make the News" in implementation of the strategic objectives identified by the Beijing Platform for Action to ensure that women have equal access to

and full participation in structures of power and
decision-making.