

UNITED NATIONS
INTER-AGENCY NETWORK ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Fact Sheet prepared for WSIS, Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION



CONNECTING GENDER AND ICT

INTRODUCTION

The ITU has initiated a series of activities to mainstream gender into the work of the organization. Following the resolution taken at the 1998 World Telecommunications Development Conference on Gender and Telecommunication Policy in developing countries, a Task Force on Gender Issues (TFGI) in the Development Sector (ITU-D) was established and transformed into a permanent Working Group on Gender Issues (WGGI) in 2002. Its aim is to ensure that the benefits of telecommunications and the emerging information society are made available to all women and men in developing countries on a fair and equitable basis. The ITU-Development Sector also resolved to act as an enabling force for the development of an active network between various types of organizations of women involved in the information and telecommunication fields, including NGO's. The Plenipotentiary Conference in 2002 resolved to accord high priority to the incorporation of gender policies in the management, staffing and operation of ITU.

1. ITU'S STRATEGIC RESPONSES

1.1 Working Group on Gender Issues (WGGI)

Aims to:

- Increase awareness of developmental impact of telecommunications of women
- Promote mainstreaming of gender issues into telecommunication policy and programmes
- Ensure that the benefits of telecommunications are equally available to women and men

Major achievements

- Gender-Aware Guidelines

Aimed at policy-making and regulatory agencies to promote gender sensitive policies that consider both women and men in the processes both as part of the processes themselves and in assessing the impact of decisions made. These guidelines offer specific recommendations on how a gender perspective can be integrated into all areas of policy, regulations and licensing.

- **Regional Seminars on Gender and ICT**

These seminars are intended to promote awareness and knowledge within the telecommunication industry at a national and regional level.

- **Access to rural ICT facilities**

Telecentres offer a multitude of services: e.g. Internet, e-mail, telephone/fax, photocopying, etc. They can provide an invaluable resource to enable women to use, produce and disseminate knowledge and information, and thereby to contribute to their communities' and countries' economic and social growth. The joint ITU-Cabo Verde Telecom project in Santa Catarina opened a Telecenter in May 2002. The center is operated by women and is open daily. There are plans to provide training for women and to introduce an e-commerce component to sell handicrafts made by women.

- **Questionnaire Survey on Gender Equality Policies and Practices**

This annual survey evaluates the progress of policy-making and regulatory agencies in implementing gender issues into all areas of their work. The questionnaire helps to build awareness, identify successful gender equality strategies and develop expertise that can be shared with other U.N. agencies, telecommunication administrations, the private sector and NGOs. The responses to the survey are entered into a database of basic indicators related to gender equality.

- **Capacity Building on Gender Mainstreaming for ITU-Development staff**

The main objective of the training is to enhance clarity among staff responsible for implementation of the four year Istanbul Action Plan (ISAP), on how they can contribute in practical ways to ITU-D's gender equality goals in the context of their daily work.

Link: <http://web.itu.int/ITU-D/gender/>

1.2 Other ITU-D initiatives

- **Internet Training Centre**

The ITU Internet Training Centres Initiative for Developing Countries (ITCI-DC) is an initiative between ITU and the private sector in which Cisco Systems Inc. is a key partner. The ITU-Cisco project at Makerere University (Uganda) for example aims to promote the participation of women in the information and communication sector.

Link:

http://www.itu.int/newsarchive/press_release/s/2002/33.html and <http://www.cisco.com>

1.3 ITU Group on Gender Issues

This internal group has adopted gender mainstreaming as its primary goal. Activities include gender awareness training and workshops for ITU staff, information sessions for ITU delegates, and participation in UN activities including Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE).

2. WSIS AND GENDER: ITU'S ROLE

- Joint Task Manager for IANWGE Task Force on Gender and ICT with a mandate to bring together UN organizations and its specialized agencies in the cross-cutting issues of ICT and Gender, through joint collaboration towards incorporating a gender perspective in the work of WSIS.

- WGGI, as a Steering Committee Member of Gender Caucus, seeks through its multi-stakeholder group of gender and ICT advocates, to ensure that gender equality issues are an integral part of the processes and outcome of WSIS.

Link:

<http://web/ITU-D/gender/GenderWSIS/>

CHALLENGES AND CONCLUSION

Over the past 5 years, Member states have become more knowledgeable and show more interest in ITU's commitment to include a gender perspective in the work of the Union. Progress has been made in gender balance in the lower professional category and in the number of women participants to ITU meetings and conferences. ITU-D has taken the lead in promoting gender equality within its work plan. However, the prevailing organizational culture reflects a focus on technical issues with the mainstreaming of gender seen as irrelevant to its programme of work. The forthcoming WSIS offers an additional opportunity to influence the ITU framework and broaden the understanding of gender equality commitments as they relate to ITU's mandate.