

Concept Note on the Strategy Planning Workshop of the Feminist Network on *Gender, Development and Information Society Policies*¹

A group of organisations engaged in advocacy on gender, development and rights – with some specifically engaged in information society policy issues – came together as a Community of Expertise (CoE) under the United Nations Global Alliance on ICTs for Development (GAID) in 2006. The objective of this network was to study the intersecting themes of *Gender, Development and Information Society Policies* (GDISP), and to channel the emerging understanding into policy processes at local, national and global levels. The CoE is an opportunity for this group of organisations to establish an affiliation with the United Nations and to actively contribute to critical advocacy processes on information society issues.

In order to build the network into a meaningful platform and develop its fundamental character, mandate and mechanisms, a strategy planning workshop will be held on October 5-7, 2007 in Bangalore, India. The workshop is being supported by UNIFEM, IDRC, HIVOS and Bread for All. The goal of the meeting will be to a) conduct a gender analysis of the policy ecology of the information society and the approaches of critical institutional players b) evolve an action plan for research and advocacy and c) develop the structure and processes that facilitate and strengthen the work of the network.

Background

While the post-WSIS context provides an immediate context for the advocacy agenda of the network, the fast-evolving information society scenario makes it imperative that a fresh examination of societal changes be undertaken through a gender lens, along with an evaluation of whether and how policy approaches have responded to address gender equality in this context.

This examination is a much ignored agenda requiring synergies between gender equality advocates in grassroots movements, academia, policy advocacy, NGOs, government, and multilateral institutions, and a multidisciplinary approach to studying and sharply defining policy imperatives for gender equality and women's rights. Ongoing feminist analysis on several themes - globalisation, work, education, skill-building, sexuality, identity, media, and so on – needs information society dimensions with new concepts for furthering women's rights.

Taking stock of the challenges to, and opportunities for, gender equality in the information society context, and articulating a Southern perspective on gender is a significant feminist project whose time has come. Such insights connect on the one hand to critiques of concepts, such as 'digital divide', 'access to ICTs', 'local ownership', and "ICT appropriation" – the meanings of which need to be unpacked in relation to existing policies and practice. On the other hand, the macro-political context of international geo-politics and global governance also needs to be better understood. This context poses new challenges in global consensus building for social justice and equity, characterised as it is by multi-stakeholderism, and associated issues of representation and legitimacy; and the absence of strong pro-south information society

¹ This concept note has been prepared by APC WNSP, ISIS International Manila, IT for Change, International Women's Tribune Centre, and Gloria Bonder, UNESCO Chair for Latin America.

frameworks. The workshop, it is hoped, will be a significant step in bringing people committed to policy change for gender equality together to act at discursive and tactical levels.

Specific objectives of the workshop:

- Situate and examine the gender question in relation to development and the information society, within frameworks offered by development studies, sociology, political economy, heterodox economics, culture studies, media studies, and emerging disciplines like community informatics.
- Build a critique of existing and emerging policy approaches and their influence on project implementation frameworks in the gender, development and information society domain, with a view to evolve progressive, development-oriented approaches.
- Trace the specific influence of global policy on national policy frameworks and identify the possible disconnects between gender and development frameworks in the evolution of gender and information society policies.
- Evolve pro-South perspectives on gender-related advocacy in relation to information society issues – deriving from, and reshaping, the larger arena of feminist advocacy on development and rights. Build linkages with current strategies and efforts to address the global governance deficit, trade and intellectual property regimes, UN reform, and so on.
- Brainstorm on the internal structures and processes of the network that will help achieve the larger objectives of the group. This includes a visioning of activity areas for the next two years, and the development of regional and thematic focal points and appropriate work structures to maximise research and advocacy initiatives.
- Specifically address the resource mobilisation plan and possibilities to carry forward the work of the network with respect to its mandate on gender, development and information society policies.

Workshop Themes and Participants

The proposed workshop will harness the expertise and perspectives of gender equality advocates from two streams – those working with information society policy, and those with expertise in gender, development and global governance issues, who may not be directly engaged with information society issues – for evolving the CoE's strategic directions.

The following thematic areas will provide a starting point for the discussions:

- Globalisation, work and the information society
- Education, skill-building and equal participation of women in the information society paradigm
- Sexuality, identity and digital spaces

- Media, community and networking in the information society
- Gendered dimensions of institutional and structural changes in the information society

The workshop participants will include:

- CoE-GDISP members – representing organisations active in information society advocacy and those active in gender and development advocacy (but not engaged directly in information society advocacy).
- Gender and development experts working at the policy level and on the ground with communities towards women’s empowerment and gender equality, for lending inputs to the analytical part on the thematic areas of discussion at the workshop.
- Experts working on technical discussions around ICTs and Internet Governance issues.
- Strategic institutional partners – UNIFEM, who is part of the CoE-GDISP; UNDP and UNESCO, in view of their strategic importance in the information society and development arena; and other organisations like IDRC, HIVOS, the Commonwealth of Learning, the GAID secretariat and members of the ‘Women and ICT Task Force’, another CoE under UN-GAID (<http://www.un-gaid.org/en/node/171>).

Workshop Organisers

The workshop is being planned by the following people/organisations:

- Association for Progressive Communications-Women’s Networking and Support Programme - Chat Garcia Ramilo, contact at: chat@apcwomen.org
- Gloria Bonder, General Coordinator of the Regional UNESCO Chair Women, Science and Technology in Latin America, and steering committee member of the erstwhile Gender Caucus of the WSIS, contact at: catunesco1@flacso.org.ar
- International Women’s Tribune Centre - Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, contact at: mavic@iwtc.org
- ISIS International Manila - Rajjeli Nicole, contact at: rajjeli@isiswomen.org
- IT for Change² - Anita Gurusurthy, contact at: anita@ITforChange.net

² IT for Change (www.ITforChange.net) is presently the secretariat of the CoE-GDISP.