

## **The WSIS Agenda and the Missing Link**

The debates and discussions leading to the WSIS agenda have extended across various themes – cultural diversity, education, health, livelihoods and economic empowerment, media, and governance. The frameworks of analysis that multiple stakeholders from the development arena have employed focused on several cross-cutting issues: access to information and social determinants of access such as gender and caste, capacities to engage with information, appropriateness of information and content, design and delivery of community-based models, technology infrastructure and the policy environment.

The debates have however, been bereft of incisive feminist perspectives that connect the global and the local. Feminist perspectives on social change, diversity, ethics, political economy, and democratic and sustainable alternatives to current paradigms from a Southern perspective, have been conspicuous by their absence in the processes and debates preceding the WSIS at Geneva.

## **Road to Tunis: Need for an Informed Agenda**

Feminist scholarship may have been limited in the ways it percolated the WSIS space, but the range of themes and issues that pertain to the information society agenda, have been sites of active feminist engagement. Much has been written and shared by feminists on key areas that constitute the significant missing links to the current expanse of the information societies debate. These include, among other things - implications of economic globalisation, the changing face of women's work and international division of labour in the new economy, the intellectual property regime and the appropriation of local knowledge by corporations, media industry and the narrow-banding of information production.

Feminist scholarship is also emergent in the areas of information technology including the internet, telecommunications policy, e-governance, freedom of expression in the new global political context and cyber regulation. However, a coherent frame of feminist analysis that charts the old and the new – that integrates and synthesises our understanding of gender in relation to the post-information economy and society is most vital in the WSIS process to Tunis.

*What we need is not just a debate about ICTs, but a discussion and strategy around the larger economic and social context in which technology is located. This calls for pro-actively seeking feminist engagement in the interface of issues pertaining to the new economy with the case studies and narratives about ground realities of women. This seminar is a step in this direction.*