

WSIS- Gender Caucus Online discussions - July 25th to August 13th 2005

WSIS- Gender Caucus Online discussion, organized and moderated under the Electronic Networking Project component of the WSIS Gender Caucus, was aimed at furthering the efforts of the Caucus to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into the WSIS deliberations, and to further explore the concrete measures that will enable us to achieve this integration. It focused on 4 critical issues currently on the table - Internet Governance, Millennium Development Goals and WSIS, Financing ICT4D initiatives, Implementation and Follow-up on the WSIS Plan of Action

We are now in the process drafting position papers for the WSIS-Gender Caucus on the above issues. [To contribute please email: anita@itforchange.net]

The issues on the table included:

1. Internet Governance:

There is a general agreement that we need to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to Internet Governance. The recently released WGIG report also underscores the importance of gender balanced representation in all aspects of Internet Governance, if we are to have a system that is equitable and democratic. In addition, the gendered construction of all technology makes it imperative that we embed gender concerns in the evolution of the Internet. Hence it is vital that we engage in the current debates on a multi-lateral vs. multi-stakeholder approach, and public versus private leadership in Internet Governance. These issues are raised in the WGIG report and will form the backdrop of our discussions as the report raises many questions – How does Internet Governance concern the interests of women? What do gender equality advocates think about these issues? What are the important issues related to Internet Governance with which gender equality advocates and women's rights activists must be engaged? [Summary of the online discussion.](#)

2. Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and WSIS:

Many argue that the WSIS process reflects a strong technologically deterministic approach to development. If they are correct, then we have to work to bring the development focus back into WSIS. Some suggest that an MDG focus, for which the WSIS was in fact mandated by the UN General Assembly, is a good peg to achieve this. However, there are others who feel that such a focus on MDGs is limiting and constraining on ICTD opportunities presented by WSIS. Such debates raise interesting questions - Do investments in technology and structural changes implied in ICTD frameworks provide a new way to look at global debates on development priorities and development assistance? Can MDGs be achieved without such investments in enabling technologies and consequent structural changes? Are such opportunities for structural and institutional change the best time to get gender perspectives and concerns considered?

[Summary of the online discussion](#)

3. Funding and Financing Mechanisms for ICTD:

Markets and the private sector have rightly taken much of the credit for the ICT revolution. The question however, is – Are current free market mechanisms adequate to take the benefit of ICTs to everyone, especially disadvantaged groups, such as women? What is the correct role of public institutions? To provide a regulatory environment that enables private investment to meet goals of social equity? What is the role of public and community finance in providing for not just cheap/free connectivity but also appropriate technology (telecom, software, hardware) and capacity? Does the basic technology infrastructure and capabilities represent a global public good, like education, that needs to be provided to all as a public responsibility? Or will such efforts of extensive public investments undercut the innovation-incentive system represented by market-based strategies, and thus be counter productive? How are issues of costs and coverage of rural/far flung areas of special significance for women? How critical are interoperability and interconnection of infrastructure at regional, sub regional and national levels for reducing cost of access?

[Summary of the online discussion](#)

4. Implementation and Follow-up of WSIS:

For gender equality advocates it has been easy to adopt a gender sensitive approach at the level of ideals and principles. But it seems that there is a difficulty in successfully integrating this approach into specific plans of action. In the WSIS documents, as one moves on from the preambles and opening statements through the plans of actions and on to actual implementation, the references to the lofty ideals of gender equality rapidly diminish. It is therefore important for us to discuss which organizations should play a pivotal role in the implementation stage, and which other organizations should play necessary supplementing roles? Which ones are poised to take up the responsibility, and what is their record on gender issues? Which ones can be expected to represent the interests of women better/ what should be the role of specialized agencies representing women's interests like the UNIFEM? What principles should be laid down to ensure a gender-equal representation in any multi-stakeholder body, which will have an implementation/ follow up role?

[Summary of the online discussion](#)