

Stakeholder Workshop

WOMEN AND ICTs: BRIDGING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE

Islamabad Regency Hotel, August 21, 2009

- ACTION PLAN -
(draft August 25, 2009)

Preamble

- Information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as telecommunication tools, broadcasting and computer equipment, provide many opportunities for development and empowerment, including those of improvement of education, health-related applications, information access and sharing, business development as well as artistic expression. Without gender-based (or other) discrimination, every citizen should have the opportunity to access and use these technologies.

Vision

- Gender equity in access to and use of ICTs is the approach, gender equality in rural and urban areas of the country is the goal.

First things first!

- Education is a basic human right of every Pakistani citizen. Besides, it is the main requirement for the beneficial use of ICTs. A major effort needs to be undertaken to provide education for all, also in rural areas!

Empowerment through awareness-raising!

- Different kind of media, from more traditional tools such as theatre to radio and internet, can play a powerful role in raising awareness on gender (in)equality. ⇒ **Media should be used for social marketing, especially TV channels should start including different female and male role models, for example in positive case studies!**
- On the other hand, awareness-raising workshops on the role of ICTs for local development and empowerment should be provided for both women and men. ⇒ **The Government should support such initiatives by NGOs and the private sector with public subsidies!**
- They may include assertiveness trainings for women, which may help dealing with abuses of ICTs, like wrong calls which have proven to be a major hurdle to women's and girls' access to and use of ICTs. ⇒ **Telecommunication companies should effectively implement a code of conduct, especially regarding 'wrong calls', privacy issues and misleading advertisements.**

Empowerment through capacity building!

- In order to move towards greater gender equality, 'transformative gender roles' need to be introduced, such as technological training for women or cooking classes for men. Women and men need to be included at all levels

here: Especially, if men do not change attitudes and behaviour, no societal change will take place.

- Computer technologies have become so important that they should start in class 1 in school. Besides building girls' and boys' capacity, this would help reducing prejudices and negative self-perceptions about girls' technological skills.
- ICT-related capacity building, such as computer training, should be included in the curriculum of vocational training institutions. Their programmes need to reach out to the local level in a culturally sensitive manner – and that way to women! ⇒ **Successful projects such as the National Commission for Human Development's (NCHD) Community Technology Learning Centers should be continued and upscaled!**
- Children and youth should be involved in ICT-related capacity building, e.g. through knowledge transfer to their mothers and sisters.
- ⇒ **A baseline study should be conducted to identify women' and men's, girls' and boys' ICT-related needs!**

Empowerment through information access and sharing!

- Radio and TV in particular are comparatively available in rural areas, their use more affordable and accessible for women and girls. Programmes in local languages, featuring local news and culture and especially addressing women's concerns should be developed by public and private providers, possibly in collaboration with NGOs/CBOs.
- Computer equipment should be available in languages other than English in order to make contents accessible to women and girls in particular and to allow their own development of contents, such as websites. ⇒ **The Government should use resources from the Universal Services Fund or the National ICT R&D Fund to upscale programmes for localized computer content, such as the Dareecha project, to all districts!**

Empowerment through income generation!

- ICTs have the potential to overcome some of the constraints women face in earning their own money. E-marketing of women's products, such as handicrafts, can help them to generate income and avoid exploitation through middlemen.
- Women-managed businesses in rural areas, such as home-based PCOs may have the double benefit of providing women and girls with socially acceptable access to telecommunication and other ICTs as well as generate income for rural women. ⇒ **The Government and private sector should support ICT-related women's businesses, e.g through micro-loans, managerial training and support with technological infrastructure and skills!**