

Expert Group Meeting

Information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

Aide Mémoire

I. Introduction

The Division for the Advancement of Women, in cooperation with the International

people living in extreme poverty by 2015. The Task Force’s mission statement and action plan recognize the potential of ICT for promoting gender equality, and for enhancing women’s educational, health and economic opportunities, and for participation in public life.

The Commission on the Status of Women, as part of its multi-year programme of work for 2002-2006, decided to consider the topic “Participation and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women” as a priority theme at its up-coming session in 2003. The Commission’s deliberations should also serve as a contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society. (The theme “participation and access of women to the media” will be the subject of a separate expert group meeting.)

II. Background

Information and communication technologies are usually understood to include computers, the rapidly improving communications technologies, including radio, television and mobile telephony, as well as networking and electronic data processing capacities, and the software for applications of these new technologies and capacities.

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are emerging. ICT have also brought improvements to health-care delivery, research and

It is thus essential to focus on the gender dimensions of the digital divide, not only to prevent adverse impact of the digital revolution on gender equality and to enhance women's equitable access to the benefits of ICT, but also to ensure that ICT can become a central tool for women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality. Policies need to ensure that the gender perspectives of ICT access and use are fully addressed so that ICT actively promote gender equality, and ensure that gender-based disadvantages are not created or perpetuated.

III. Objectives

The expert group meeting will consider the impact of ICT on women and their use as a tool for the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality, in selected areas. It will address the challenges and benefits women encounter with regard to ICT and explore ways to close the gender-based digital divide. It will develop policy recommendations and concrete actions to be taken at national, regional and international levels, and by a variety of actors, that aim at securing the full benefit of ICT in pursuit of gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women.

In particular, the expert group meeting will address the following areas:

a)

- c) **ICT as an instrument for enhancing women's capabilities:** Knowledge and information are necessary to ensure optimum benefit from ICT. At the same time, ICT are themselves a source of knowledge and information. Knowledge and information are also essential ingredients for empowerment. The meeting will analyse ways to ensure that ICT are a tool for enhancing women's knowledge and information base, and thus their empowerment. Focusing on a selected number of areas, the meeting will make recommendations to ensure that women have opportunities to develop the necessary skills for using ICT, especially to enhance their education, training, and health. It will also recommend actions to enhance women's capacity to produce ICT-based knowledge and information, and applications. It will further discuss the content of information and knowledge available through the Internet from a gender perspective, and make related recommendations.
- d) **ICT as an instrument for women's economic empowerment:** At the same time as ICT are creating new economic opportunities, they are also undermining some traditional or existing bases of livelihoods. The meeting will suggest measures for enhancing women's skills to take advantage of new economic opportunities, avoiding women's segregation into lower-paying ICT-related sectors, and strengthening women's access to new business and entrepreneurship opportunities, including through e-commerce.

IV. Expected outcome

The outcome of the expert group meeting will be a report containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations addressed to different actors at different levels on ICT as a tool for the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality. The report will be widely distributed, including through the DAW Website. The findings and conclusions of the expert group meeting will also provide the basis for a report of the Secretary-General on this theme to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2003. The outcome of the Commission's consideration of this theme will be a contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, 2003 and Tunis, 2005).

