Gender and Information and Communication Technologies

Task Managers: ITU/UNESCO/FAO

**Report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Gender and Information and
Communication Technologies
for the
Meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality
New York, 22-25 February 2005**

The main concern of the Task Force has been to ensure the integration of a gender equality dimension into the World Summit on the Information Society and to promote the ongoing projects on gender and ICT in the UN System organizations.

At the IANWGE meeting in February 2003, ITU, FAO and UNESCO agreed to coordinate the work of the Task Force to this end. DAW, ECE, ESCWA, INSTAW, ILO, UNCTAD, UNIFEM, UNDP and World Bank signed up as members of the Task Force.

The Task Force held a Teleconference in May 2003 to discuss specific activities that could be initiated by the Task Force to meet its objectives.

All Members were encouraged to prepare two-page summaries of the organizations' work in gender and ICT. ITU proposed a common template, coordinated the preparation and submission of the Fact Sheets, and posted them on the ITU gender & WSIS website. ITU also covered the cost of translation of 12 Fact Sheets on Gender and ICT into French and Spanish for a wider distribution at the Summit in December 2003.

Fact sheets were received from DAW, FAO, ITC, ITU, INSTRAW (2), UNCTAD, UNECE, UNESCO, UNIFEM (2), and the World Bank. (Fact Sheets attached as Annex 1. Also available at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/gender/GenderWSIS/index.html

UNESCO organized an Expert Group Meeting on Gender Issues in the Information Society at UNESCO Headquarters on 14 July 2003. The meeting aimed at providing space for a dialogue and sharing of innovative ideas on how to establish ICT policies and development programmes which ensure a full integration of gender perspectives. The report included policy options and useful recommendations for the establishment of a common strategy to better address gender related issues at the WSIS.

The IANWGE Fact Sheets were distributed to delegates at the WSIS Inter-sessional meeting in Paris, 15-18 July 2003, the Preparatory Committee for WSIS (PrepCom-3), 15-26 September and 10-14 November 2003 and at the first phase of the World Summit, 10 -12 December 2003.

A close collaboration with the WSIS Gender Caucus was effective in ensuring the inclusion of gender-sensitive language in the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action during Prepcom 3: specifically paragraphs 1, 12 and 29 of the Declaration of Principles are quoted below.

1.   Our challenge is to harness the potential of information and communication technology to promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration, namely the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and development of global partnerships for development for the attainment of a more peaceful, just and prosperous world. We also reiterate our commitment to the achievement of sustainable development and agreed development goals, as contained in the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation and the Monterrey Consensus, and other outcomes of relevant United Nations Summits.

12.   We affirm that development of ICTs provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors, in the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis on equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. To this end, we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end.

Capacity-building

**29.   ** Each person should have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in order to understand, participate actively in, and benefit fully from, the Information Society and the knowledge economy. Literacy and universal primary education are key factors for building a fully inclusive information society, paying particular attention to the special needs of girls and women. Given the wide range of ICT and information specialists required at all levels, building institutional capacity deserves special attention.

During the Summit, 12 Panel Sessions were organized by the WSIS Gender Caucus as side-events, including regional themes for Africa, Asia & Pacific, Europe, CIS and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East & Western Asia. ITU participated actively in these sessions and also disseminated the IANWGE Fact Sheets at the ITU and Gender Caucus stands during the Summit. The INSTRAW report on "Overcoming the Gender Digital Divide: understanding ICTs and their potential for the empowerment of women" (Sophia Huyer and Tatjana Sikoska) was also made available.

Following a discussion among Task Force members concerning a possible IANWGE side event at the December summit, it was concluded that each organization should be responsible to mainstream a gender perspective in its own special session or side event. Side events with specific gender perspective debates were organized by several of the Task Force Organizations.

The final versions of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action may be accessed at www.itu.int/wsis/documents/index.asp

Conclusion:

The IANWGE Task Force on Gender and ICT may wish to assess the need to continue its work towards the 2nd phase of WSIS, scheduled from 16 to 18 November 2005 in Tunis. What should be its future activities, if any, and what would be the most effective way to ensure a positive impact. Taking into consideration that the 2nd phase will concentrate on the development impact of ICT applications, UNESCO may wish to take the lead for any future Task Force initiatives.