

## Women and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

The new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have great potential to benefit women worldwide. As a vast source of information, ICTs constitute a powerful learning tool; they provide access to training and market information that can help women's businesses succeed, and they offer a direct and more inexpensive means of communication for women's organizations and enable them to share knowledge on a quick and collective basis.

However, access to these new technologies is restricted, and ensuring that the policies that guide their use are gender-responsive remains a challenge. Low levels of literacy, limited technological access, know-how and the often inadequate infrastructure and high cost of connectivity in developing nations, prevent many women from taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by ICTs.

### UNIFEM's Response

UNIFEM recognizes the importance of guaranteeing women's active and equal participation in the rapid march towards the development of knowledge societies. The Fund is partnering with governments, NGOs, UN organizations and the private sector to facilitate women's participation in developing programmes which demonstrate women's visions of the use of ICT's, encourage women's employment in ICT fields and facilitate the access of women to new technologies.

UNIFEM's work on gender and ICTs focuses on the following priority areas:

- **Engaging in policy dialogue and advocacy efforts** to promote women's participation and a gender perspective in the development and governance of ICTs.
- **Strengthening innovative initiatives** for the use of ICTs for women's economic and political empowerment.
- **Developing ICT tools to share information** on gender-specific issues.

### At Work Around the World

- In **Jordan**, UNIFEM's partnership with Cisco Systems and the Jordanian Government helped shape a curriculum targeting young women for ten Cisco Networking Academy Programmes. The programme, aimed at increasing women's access to high-quality jobs in the IT sector, saw an increase in women's enrolment to 63.3% in 2002. Balqa Applied University has incorporated the programme into its curriculum as a compulsory course and other Jordanian academies are following suit. The success of the partnership has led to an agreement to replicate it beginning in 2004 in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Iraq, as well as to mainstream gender equality into a Jordanian "e-village" initiative. The partnership has also resulted in better research on Jordanian women in the ICT sector, and the use of this data by ICT and Ministry of Education planners for policies, programmes and evaluating the impact of CISCO training on graduates.
- In 2002, UNIFEM launched its initiative "Bridging the Gender Digital Divide through Strategic Partnerships", establishing a Global Advisory Committee comprised mainly of successful African ICT entrepreneurs from the global Diaspora, with the purpose of harnessing the financial resources, IT and business expertise of these entrepreneurs to tackle the challenges of feminized

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poverty in **Africa**. In May 2003, Committee members met in Kampala, Uganda, to launch the **Digital Diaspora Initiative**, organized by UNIFEM in collaboration with UN partners – the UN Development Programme, the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the UN Fund for International Partnerships and the UN ICT Task Force. They discussed with African Ministers, Parliamentarians, representatives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the private sector, NGOs and the UN System, ways to bridge the digital divide that particularly affects African women. A main outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the Kampala Declaration, which formalized the partnership between the United Nations, African governments, NGOs, ICT entrepreneurs, and the Diaspora, to take concrete steps towards the creation of an enabling ICT environment for women in Africa. A first pilot initiative is currently being established in **Rwanda**, where Digital Diaspora trainers will share their expertise and technical know-how with women's organizations throughout the country. Plans for similar efforts in Eritrea are under way.

- UNIFEM has supported the creation and the work of the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Gender Caucus**, a multi-stakeholder group consisting of women and men from national governments, civil society organizations, NGOs, the private sector and the United Nations system, working to ensure that gender equality and women's rights are integrated into the WSIS and its outcome processes. Created through the efforts of ICT-oriented African women's NGOs during the African WSIS preparatory meeting in Mali, the Gender Caucus has expanded to become a global caucus on gender and ICTs, operating through on-line networking, and organizing around the WSIS.
- UNIFEM has partnered with InfoDev, a World Bank initiative, and the African Centre for Women, Information and Communications Technology to launch **Hawknet**, a regional portal for knowledge and information on gender issues in the **Horn of Africa**. Hawknet, which stands for The Horn of Africa Region Women's Knowledge Network, is designed to enable women to discuss emerging national issues, network, participate in global debates and have a voice on national policies regarding information and communication technologies (ICTs). A website **Arab Women Connect** ([www.arabwomenconnect.org](http://www.arabwomenconnect.org)) was also launched by UNIFEM as part of a regional strategy to increase Arab women's use of and influence on new information and communication technologies. To date, women's organizations in **Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Yemen, United Arab Emirates and Qatar** have joined this initiative.
- With UNIFEM support, DEVNET established the Women into the New Network for Entrepreneurial Reinforcement (WINNER), a global programme that seeks to strengthen the practical and technical skills of women entrepreneurs through basic training on the Internet, e-commerce, international trade, business management and gender issues. Over 1,500 women have already received WINNER training, in countries like **Ecuador, Albania, Romania, Nepal, Philippines, China, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe**.
- In an effort to further utilize ICTs to vastly expand the provision of and access to information on issues related to women's rights, UNIFEM also developed two web portals in 2003. In collaboration with UNAIDS, the **web portal on gender and HIV/AIDS** ([www.genderandaids.org](http://www.genderandaids.org)) was developed to be the first comprehensive online resource on the gender dimensions of the epidemic. The portal aims to promote understanding, knowledge sharing and action on HIV/AIDS as a gender and human rights issue. A **web portal on women, peace and security** ([www.womenwarpeace.org](http://www.womenwarpeace.org)), launched in October 2003, acts as a central information repository on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building. Targeted at policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and the media, it offers gender profiles of conflict countries, briefs on issues that affect women and girls just before, during and after conflict, and information on gender programming in conflict zones.

## About UNIFEM

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) works to promote women's empowerment, rights and gender equality worldwide.