

IGF 2017 Reporting Template

Session Title:

[Tackling gender divides: ICT and women's economic empowerment \(WS37\)](#)

Date:

18 December

Time:

9:00 – 10:30

Session Organizer:

International Chamber of Commerce Business Action to Support the Information Society (ICC BASIS)
New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)
Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

Chair/Moderator:

Elizabeth Thomas-Raynaud (ICC BASIS)

Rapporteur/Notetaker:

Sheetal Kumar (GPD)

List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:

Speaker: Ambassador Tobias Feakin, Government of Australia

Speaker: Reema Nanavaty SEWA

Speaker: Mata Coulibaly, NEPAD/African Union

Speaker: Kate Doyle, Promundo

Speaker: Asma Ennaifer, Orange

Speaker: Will Hudson, Google

Speaker: Joyce Dogniez, Internet Society

Key Issues raised (1 sentence per issue):

- ICT's are an enabler of all the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including the gender inclusion goal 5
- Social norms need to be addressed to facilitate women's access and use of ICTs
- ICTs can be economically empowering by enabling women to access new markets and revenue
- The importance of local partnerships
- The importance of involving a diversity of stakeholders in initiatives

If there were presentations during the session, please provide a 1-paragraph summary for each presentation:

Ambassador Tobias Feakin, Government of Australia

The government of Australia sees ICTs as a key part of the transformative potential of the SDGs. In Australia, they are working to address the gender divide in the Australian ICT workforce (for example, only 11 percent of the cybersecurity workforce is women). The government is working in partnership to try and change that, and tackling the gender divide is a key focus of the cybersecurity strategy. For example, it is important that women know that careers in cybersecurity and mentoring are available to them. The government has also committed to targets including to fill at least 30 percent of the skills gap and workforce with women. The government has an ongoing commitment to highlighting gender divides at the international level. For example, all development work funded has to be sensitive to gender issues, and there has been increased funding in that area.

Joyce Dogniez, Internet Society

ISOC's vision is to bring the open, global and secure Internet to everyone. However, at least half of the world's population is not online and many women are not connected. Role models of successful women in ICT are an important vehicle to address this. This is one of the reasons ISOC brings young ambassadors to the IGF, they do amazing things in their own communities. One of them is from Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya who works with an organisation called 'Tunapanda'. She has been part of setting up 'Tunapanda Net' – a local network used for training, education, contributing Wikipedia content in the local language, running opensource MOOCs etc. It is important because it allows for people to have access to new opportunities and supports ISOC's work to advocate for enabling environments which ensure that there are alternative models of connectivity, providing meaningful access. For example, local networks can allow access to micro-loans – this is really important for women who don't have access to bank accounts. Complementary skills training alongside ICT training is very important for success, in order to make sure that women can take full advantage of the opportunities offered by ICTs. Apart from these local initiatives, ISOC also does a lot of advocacy in international fora for inclusion of women and has set up a women's special interest group. It is also a partner on the Equals partnership for women (ITU/UNWomen/GSMA) to try and find a more cohesive approach to women's empowerment issues.

Will Hudson, Google

Google believes there needs to be different approaches to different problems as there is no one size fits all model. Addressing women's economic empowerment through ICT can vary from coding programs for STEM to programs to support women entrepreneurs. As an example, Google runs a program in India where two thirds of the population does not have access and of that population two thirds are women. This program is called "Internet Saathi" and it uses "cybercarts", or bicycles with internet enabled phones and tablets at the back of the cycles. The aim is to train women to use technology for economic empowerment in rural areas. In order to do this, trusted people in the communities are the ones who deliver the training. For example, there is a woman (Buji) who had never had a smartphone and she's now trained thousands of people and her neighborhood on how to use phones to access the internet. She's also now learned how to make more intricate sari designs and as a sari designer this has helped vastly

increase her revenue. The example of Internet Saathi illustrates the importance of partnerships between stakeholders such as NGOs and local industries.

Kate Doyle, Promundo

Research and programming has shown that we need to do a lot to transform attitudes to women's employment (in coordination with men and others in the community). For example, Promundo recently conducted a study in Egypt and Lebanon which found that the majority of men think that men should be the priority when it comes to employment. It is therefore important to challenge harmful gender norms. A recent UNICEF report highlights that when girls and women do get online they can face harassment. ICTs can be a great opportunity but rigid ideas of women's role in society can lead to abuse and used as an excuse to keep women away from accessing ICTs (with the excuse that this 'protects them'). So we need to address what is happening online but not allow that to be used as an excuse to keep women from being online. Unpaid care work is also a problem because it can stop women from taking on employment. For that reason, redistribution of unpaid care work is important. It's also important to improve relevant policies like childcare policies so that women have more time to go online and partake in opportunities. One of the key areas that Promundo has noticed is the importance of taking back or reclaiming of public spaces by women. For example, when it comes to having control over electricity and access to affordable devices – the mother is often devoid of access because of her traditional role in the family/community. Therefore, cultural, social and economic barriers to access are linked. Local language content is important and creating safe spaces for women to come online and express themselves.

Asma Ennaifer, Orange Tunisia

In 2010, Orange Tunisia put in place a 'CSR' strategy with the aim of supporting Tunisia's digital transformation. We know that there will be many new jobs in the future, we don't know what they are – but we do know they will be digital. One initiative that is part of that CSR strategy is a coding program to train young women to code. There is also a program for young girls and women (aged 10-18) to help them create mobile apps responsive to the needs of their communities. The other initiative is the 'digital houses' project and it is aimed at women in the handicraft industry. Orange has set up fourteen 'digital houses' in Tunisia. These houses are a place where young girls train older women so that they run their own projects or businesses online. It therefore facilitates women's startups. Starting this year, platforms have been created for older women artisans whose revenue has increased by 70%. The handicraft industry is common across the region and so it is hoped this platform could grow much bigger and be able to connect women across the region. The ultimate aim is the economic empowerment of women. Orange is convinced that the more women are economically empowered, the better this is for society overall by helping to reduce social problems. There is an optimistic outlook - that we are in the years of improving women's lives worldwide.

Mata Coulibaly, NEPAD/ African Union

NEPAD is an implementation agency for the AU's vision and strategy through the Agenda 2063. A priority area of the Agenda 2063 Goal 5 concerns Women and Girls empowerment and it's recognized that we need to empower women through ICTs. Telecommunications has traditionally been very expensive and so internet access is important. A lot of women are in the informal sector and in rural areas it is very difficult and so internet access can also facilitate trade by reducing costs. NEPAD sees that it is important to increase the ability of women to

work from home (flexibility is key) and to improve employment opportunities in the ICT sector. Ensuring affordable access is essential - if the cost of the internet is cheap then women have more opportunities for e-commerce. NEPAD has also identified that is important for women's economic empowerment to improve women's access to distance learning.

Reema Nanavaty, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

SEWA is a trade union of women workers from informal economy. Its members come from varied strata of society and it organizes women workers without any discrimination. This diversity works to the advantage of the members themselves as in – the younger generation members became mentors for the older generation in newer initiatives making it easier for the older generation women workers to adapt and adopt the newer tools and initiatives like ICT. SEWA has experience in implementing digital inclusion at grass-root level amongst women workers from informal sector in urban as well as rural areas. SEWA's research shows that if technology is introduced at community level - through women's own organizations, with aim to benefit not only the individuals alone but also their organization as a whole, then it's the collective effort of the women workers as an organization that provides hand-holding and peer support to members, enabling faster adaptation and up-take of such technology. In addition, if the technology implementation in form of customized apps and tailor-made initiatives is need-based, linked to users' trades and designed to overcome the challenges and barriers faced by women workers in their day-to-day lives and livelihood, then the up-take of such technology is much faster. For example, SEWA created an app, and this has helped increase the number of women under the fold of SEWA bank by twenty five percent. Other ways that women in SEWA have used ICTs to generate livelihoods include partnering with Google on the Internet Saathi program. SEWA have also partnered with Facebook so that young women have created Facebook accounts and have managed to increase customers and revenue. Partners also include Airbnb for women to register and rent spaces in their homes.

SEWA's experience working with poor women workers from informal economy shows that the poor do not want charity. On the contrary, any initiative / programme including the digital tools and initiatives when made collaboratively, brings in a sense of ownership amongst the workers towards that initiative along with dignity, self-confidence and respect from community and society.

Please describe the discussions that took place during the workshop session (3 paragraphs):

Each discussant gave examples of initiatives either they or their employer is engaged in in order to advance women's economic empowerment (see descriptions of their interventions above). This was followed by questions and interaction with the audience which picked up on some of the points raised in the interventions. For example, questions were asked regarding how the generational gender gap can be addressed (the fact that older women are often left out of ICT opportunities), how the private sector can support flexible working, what can be done to ensure appreciation for the internet more generally in traditional societies where trust or access is lacking as well as what can be done about the fact that men own a lot of the ICTs (devices and gadgets) in households.

It was noted that these are difficult questions that go beyond just the internet and are about cultural norms. One of the main challenges is that these issues are about gender roles which are inculcated at a very early age and it's a common responsibility to ensure that this is

addressed. The cultural nuances of women's roles etc. highlights why it is so important that different stakeholders are involved in initiatives to empower women economically using ICTs. Education is a very important element or challenging gender norms - it is important that this is high quality that capacities are created early on and that girls and women are aware of the opportunities available to them for employment and careers in ICT.

It was pointed out that the examples provided by the speakers and the points raised by speakers can be used more widely to help further empower women economically (see way forward/potential next steps/key takeaways below).

Please describe any participant suggestions regarding the way forward/ potential next steps /key takeaways (3 paragraphs):

- It was agreed that ICT is an enabler for advancing women's economic empowerment. For example, ICTs can be economically empowering by allowing women to access new markets and revenue much more easily
- Challenging traditional gender norms is essential: In some parts of the world, there is a need to transform attitudes to women's employment and rigid social norms can be a major obstacle to women's access and use to ICTs. Flexible opportunities that directly respond to the needs of women and which are sensitive to traditional/cultural barriers they may face is important as is creating safe spaces for women
- Partnership is key: Training is important but in order for this to be successful it is important to work in partnership with local partners, including industry and civil society. There were many examples of this in the interventions of the speakers
 - *Google*: Internet Saathi
 - *ISOC*: Young Ambassadors program
 - *Orange*: Digital houses initiative and young women coding and mobile apps initiative
 - *SEWA*: mobile bank app and partnering with industry including Google, Facebook and Airbnb to increase women's revenue and profit

Gender Reporting:

Estimate the overall number of the participants present at the session:

25

Estimate the overall number of women present at the session:

15

To what extent did the session discuss gender equality and/or women's empowerment?

The session was focused on gender equality and women's economic empowerment

If the session addressed issues related to gender equality and/or women's empowerment, please provide a brief summary of the discussion:

Please see the key messages above.