

Forum: Special Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Issue: Promoting women's empowerment through information and communication technology

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Introduction

Over the past couple of decades, the number of people connected to the internet has increased dramatically. During 1995, only 16 million people used the internet, or 0.4% of earth's population back then. Now, in 2017, nearly 3.9 billion people use the internet, or 51.7% of the world's population, this year being the year where over half of the planet's population has had internet access. Social media has also had a huge boom over the last 15 years, Facebook has over 2 billion monthly active users, 1.32 billion of which are daily users. Clearly the internet, including social media, has a huge potential to be a platform for women's empowerment, providing that it is exploited correctly.

While achieving gender equality worldwide continues to be a large issue, the developed world has come very far in the last century or so, however the developing world has not progressed as much. For example, Saudi Arabia only recently passed a law that allows to women to drive, after decades of only men being allowed to drive. The reasons for the lack of gender equality in developing countries often stem from social and political stigma. While social media could be used to influence people in said developing countries, there is an issue with the fact that a lower percentage of the population in developing countries have internet access. In fact, while over half the population of the planet as a whole is connected to the internet, only 25% of Africa's in 2016 was. If we want to use the internet to help promote women's empowerment in the developing world, it's clear that plans have to be put in place to increase the number of people who are connected to the internet there.

Definition of Key Terms

Internet

The internet is a global network of interconnected computers. Born out of in the 1970's, the internet has come into its own over the last couple of decades. A vast number of people use the internet,

and it has become an essential part of daily life for many, however a large percentage of the population still don't have an internet connection.

Women's empowerment

Women's empowerment is essentially the act of giving the female population power which they currently lack (and often males possess). The UN has defined Women's empowerment as having 5 main components:-

- Women's right to have and to determine their choices;
- Generating Women's sense of self-worth;
- Women's right to have access to equal opportunities and all kinds of resources;
- Women's right to have the power to regulate and control their own lives, within and outside the home; and
- Women's ability to contribute in creating a more just social and economic order.

Women's Suffrage

Women's Suffrage is the right for women to vote in elections, and also to run for office. Many Women's Suffrage movements took part in the 20th Century, and the vast majority succeeded. All countries with elections allow women to vote, with Saudi Arabia being the last country to adopt the policy of Women's Suffrage in 2015.

Gender Equality

Gender Equality is the notion that every human being, both male and female, are equal. There has always been a disparity between men and women in society, though over the last century thankfully this gap has begun to close. Despite this in many places the gap between women and men is still painfully apparent. The UN describes gender equality as "not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world".

Cyber Harassment

Cyber Harassment is a form of Cyber Bullying that involves the use of ICT to control, harass, or manipulate another person online, without directly threatening the victim with physical violence. Cyber Harassment can involve verbal, sexual, emotional, or social abuse of a person. Unfortunately women are often on the receiving end of Cyber Harassment, due to their gender, and the abuse they receive is often of a sexual nature.

Background Information

In the last century, women's empowerment and gender equality has become a large topic of debate. Women were granted the right to vote in the early 20th century in many developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Russia. Many developed countries also adopted an "Equal pay for equal work" law in the mid to late 20th century, however despite this there is still a wage disparity between women and men in the same occupation in many of these countries.

In 1975, the first World's Conference on Women was held by the UN. This conference marked a turning point in policy on women. Up until that point, women were seen as the recipients of assistance, and weren't involved in the drafting of policies, and after the conference women were then viewed as a vital part of the process, and should be involved in their empowerment. The UN has since held more World Conferences on Women, perhaps most notably the fourth in 1995, which saw the "Beijing Declaration and platform for action" passed.

The Beijing Declaration was a historic resolution, which passed at maybe the most historic Women's Conference, which saw 17000 participants, and 30000 NGO representatives participating in a parallel forum. It's been described as the "most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights", and outlined commitments for 12 main areas of concern, which are as follows: Women and the environment, Women in power and decision-making, The girl child, Women and the economy, Violence against women, Women and poverty, Human rights of women, Education and training of women, Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, Women and health, Women and the media, and Women and armed conflict. Every UN member state that signed the Beijing Declaration is legally bound to the commitments that it describes, and 20 years on, it has paved the way for women and girls to be able to express their rights, such as to earn equal pay and to be able to go to school.

Another extremely important convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 18th of December 1979, and went into effect as an international treaty on the 3rd of September 1981 after the 20th country had ratified it. It went into great detail with the Civil rights and legal status of women, but also, unlike any other women's and human rights resolutions/treaties, it dealt with the rights aspect of human reproduction and the cultural impact on gender relations. Other notable critical aspects that CEDAW dealt with was the actual definition of "Discrimination against women" and the Full Development and Advancement of Women, and Equality of Women's and Men's Rights and Freedoms.

The issue at hand calls for the use of IT and communication technology to promote women's empowerment, however that technology comes from an industry that is hugely dominated by males at the current time. In tech giants like Microsoft and Google, women only make up 24% and 29% of their

workforce respectively. The number of women studying computer science (and other STEM related subjects) has actually declined steeply over the last couple of decades, only leveling off between 14 and 18% in recent years. Therefore, it's clear that the main issue with lack of women in the tech industry spans from the lack of women studying subjects related to tech at university, so there must be an increase in this before we can see a huge increase in the number of women working in the tech industry.

Those that live in rural areas in LEDCs are in a situation where there simply is no way for them to connect to the internet. This is often down to the fact that such developing countries lack enough qualified engineers, uneven terrain, and unreliable electricity in qualified areas, which makes it either infeasible or unprofitable for ISPs to build the infrastructure required to provide an internet connection for rural areas. There are however a number of startup companies and labs that are working to provide flexible, inexpensive internet to those living in the developing world, such as Technology and Infrastructure for Emerging Regions (TIER) at UC Berkely, BRCK, Kili, Everylayer, and Range Networks. TIER are aiming to ensure that people earning as little as \$100 a month, and have little experience using tech, are able to afford and make use of what they build. They are also making sure that their tech can be run off generators, hydro power, solar power, as well as local energy grids. In addition to this, TIER has spawned multiple startup companies of its own. One of these startups, Endaga has developed an alternative to normal cellular base stations, which normally cost \$250,000 USD and require "extensive support" that cost only \$6000 USD and can be mounted on trees or poles, and can run off of whatever power the settlement it's set up in uses.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States

The United States has been at the forefront of Civil Rights movements over the past decades, including those on Gender Equality, such as the recent movements in America demanding equal pay for women. The US has generally been supportive and actively involved in the drafting of UN conventions on women's rights, and also takes an active role in international support of women's rights. For example, the US Agency for International Development co-launched a program called Saving Mothers, Giving Life in Uganda and Zambia in 2012, funded publicly and privately, which reduced maternal mortality by about a third in a single year after its launch, and has continued to reduce maternal mortality rates since then. They have other programs extending to 80 countries, and their policy, released in 2012, includes the notions of women needing access to education, healthcare, and technology, for society to thrive.

India

In ancient India women were actually seen as equal to men. However, in medieval times women's rights in India degenerated. Women were forced into marriages, sometimes as children, and

they were made to be completely dependent on their male family members. Their freedom, right to education and right to work were all relinquished. Under British rule, civil rights movements forced Britain to reevaluate and change laws to give women more rights throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Since their independence, India has drafted laws to outlaw discrimination against women, and in 2001 their National Policy for the Empowerment of Women outlined the government’s intentions to change social norms and to strengthen their gender equality laws. Social media has played a great part in empowering women in India in recent years, as many women are still unfortunately sexually harassed and forced into arranged marriages. Hopefully, with the advent of the government’s policies, and with the continued use of empowerment through social media, conditions for women in India can be improved.

Code First: Girls

Code First: Girls is a non-profit organisation based in the United Kingdom. Raising revenue through sponsorship and corporate services, 100% of their profits get put into running free courses in coding for females, and since 2013 they have delivered courses collectively worth £2.5 million to young women in the UK. Their main goal is to increase the number of women at tech, where they currently only represent 17% of the UK’s tech industry workforce.

Girls Who Code

Girls Who Code is an organisation based in the United States that has thousands of clubs, spread across all 50 states in America. The clubs teach coding to females who are interested in problem solving. 65% of their club participants have said that they are now interested in doing a major or minor in computer science because of Girls Who Code, and 93% of their Summer Immersion Program participants said that they now want to major in, or are interested in computer science. So far, they have taught over 30000 girls code, and that number is projected to rise to 40000 by the end of 2017.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Events
March 15 1907	Finland becomes the first European country to introduce women’s suffrage, and the first country in the world to elect female members of parliament in the 1907 elections.
June 10 1963	US president John F Kennedy signs the Equal pay act of 1963, which states that No employer shall discriminate between employees on the basis

	of sex by paying employees of the opposite sex higher wages for equal work on jobs. Many European countries follow suit by signing their own equal pay laws in the following years.
12 June 1975	The first World Conference on Women is held in Mexico City, Mexico, by the UN.
12 June 1975	The Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women is adopted by the UN General Assembly.
15 September 1995	The Beijing Declaration and platform for action, a resolution concerning women's rights and empowerment, passes at The Fourth world Conference on Women, during the year of the 50th anniversary of the formation of the United Nations.
March 2017	The time at which the percentage of the world's population that is connected to the internet surpassed 50%

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, 18 December 1979
- Declaration on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa, 3 December 1984 (**A/RES/39/29**)
- Beijing Declaration and platform for action, 15th September 1995

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The UN has previously published a document focusing specifically on promoting Gender equality and women's empowerment through ICT in September 2005, building upon the Beijing Declaration in anticipation of promoting its goals. The document goes into great detail, and names specific countries and how they've promoted women's empowerment through ICT, and how they should improve. For example, it mentions women's radio clubs in Zimbabwe, which give women access to radios and also play an active role in the development of many programmes that aim to meet their priorities.

In Uganda, women in the Nakaseke region were given access to a CD-ROM containing education info on enterprise and the food market, after they stated that they need to know more about the subjects. The CD-ROM specifically catered to them, using local languages and simple terminology to assist those without great literacy skills. Women used the CD-ROM at a local telecentre, and it was a

large success, with the community there now working on training women from other regions to use ICT themselves. In another, similar, case in Senegal, a mobile telecommunications company called Sonatel worked with a French company called Manobi to give mobile phones to rural women working in the agricultural sector. The phones had access to the internet through the local cellular network, and this access to the internet gave the women there instantaneous information about market prices, so they could sell their food at an appropriate price. The women involved in this stated that they preferred using cell phones than computers, because of the high portability of the phones.

In South Korea, between 2001 and 2002, the government established programmes to train women to become IT professionals, in order to economically empower them. The programmes were tailored to suit the needs of women from many different backgrounds, and also accommodated for the busy schedule that many women have. All in all, the programmes were a resounding success, with roughly two thirds of the women who completed the 10-12 month course finding work, or starting their own business.

The United Nations had worked on promoting women's empowerment through IT by launching WomenWatch in 1997. WomenWatch is a website that is a "gateway" to information on what is being done to promote gender equality worldwide. Information provided includes statistics and research, and also information on intergovernmental efforts such as the Commission on the Status of Women, and the work of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women. In addition to this, WomenWatch also provides links to other multiple other websites relevant to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Possible Solutions

Firstly, the UN and member state governments could fund online advertising campaigns that target the world's most popular sites, such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Reddit and Baidu (in China) where adverts promoting gender equality and women's empowerment would be viewed by millions of people daily. Such adverts could link to a page, perhaps UN Women's website, or a website dedicated to the campaign, that provides viewers with information on what the global standards of female rights should be in the viewer's own language. The fact that millions of people will be exposed to these adverts means that they will aid in reducing any stigma towards women and change people's archaic views on gender equality and women's rights over a long-term period of time.

It's also important to echo the policy changes that came from the 1975 World Conference on Women, and to involve women in the process of their empowerment. The internet should be used to reach out to millions of women, and ask for their feedback on women's empowerment. UN and state endorsed surveys could be hosted online, and promoted by the aforementioned advertising. The

exposure that these surveys would get would be much greater than physical surveys that would have to be posted or handed out. They'd also be more environmentally friendly (physical surveys would have an impact on the environment due to vehicle deliveries and the use of paper), and would take much less effort to carry out, as they could be completed and submitted from the comfort of one's own home, instead of being physically written and then posted/handed in.

The UN and its member states could also do well to tackle multiple issues at the same time by working to break down gender stereotypes in tech. As mentioned earlier in this report, the tech industry is currently dominated by males. If the more organisations such as Code First: Girls were set up, with support from the UN, then more of the female population would be given the opportunity to learn how to work in one of the world's fastest growing and most important industries. It is also important to ensure that current initiatives that provide education in IT and communication technologies in the developing world are encouraged to appeal to females to join their courses. The aforementioned ad campaigns promoting women's empowerment could be employed to also promote females in the tech industry, hopefully inspiring more females to learn code etc.

Financial aid could be provided to developing nations that can't afford to build modern, nationwide infrastructure, so that people are able to connect to the internet, and will be able to view any adverts that are promoting women's empowerment, as well as being able to use many of the internet's benefits that have become an essential part of life for many in the western world.

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Appendix or Appendices

I. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf> (United Nations)

This is a link to the full Beijing Declaration resolution, which gives great insight to what the global standards for women's empowerment should be. It is very long, however it is extremely comprehensive,

outlining actions that each signatory government should take, and can provide great inspiration for resolutions that build upon it, including IT and communication technology which has obviously advanced since the Declaration was drafted (1995).