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Highway Africa's Workshop
Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa
16 – 18 September 2004

➤ **Background to WSIS-GC**

The World Summit on the Information Society Gender Caucus (WSIS-GC) was formed during the regional preparatory conference, in Bamako, Mali in 2002. The WSIS-GC during the PrepCom1 meeting affirmed that integrating gender equality issues is a critical means as well as a goal in creating a World Information Society that supports and promotes human development and improvement in quality of life.

The WSIS Gender Caucus is a multi-stakeholder group consisting of representatives of parliaments, national governments, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the United Nations system. The WSIS-GC affirms its support for the WSIS and commits to work towards the expected outputs of the WSIS by sharing information and ideas on strategies for including gender equality goals and ensuring women's participation in the WSIS process and its outcomes, including follow-up programmes.

➤ **WSIS GC Priority Activities**

The WSIS-GC has chosen to focus on the following activities between now and Tunis 2005. They are:

- Research;
- Developing sustainable networks;
- Electronic networking;
- Capacity building and
- Regional activities

Giving attention to these priority activities will ensure that deliberations made at PrepComs and Summits impact positively on the quality of life of all women and men, especially marginalised women.

➤ **Background to the GC's participation in the Highway Africa Workshop**

Integral to our understanding of gender equality is the realisation that unequal power relations in our societies can contribute to differential access, participation and treatment for men and women in the Information Society. Unequal power relations are made manifest in the following ways: lower levels of education of females than males in many poor countries; the tendency for males to receive technical education more than females do; and the disproportionate representations of males in technology-intensive workplaces.

Various reports, discussions and other communication indicate that although male and female journalists cover ICT issues the same way; there are few reports on gender and ICT issues; all journalists need to undergo gender-sensitive training and that gender-sensitive policies and initiatives need to be combined with awareness-raising programs to ensure that women are not left out of the new civic and economic opportunities that ICTs offer.

The involvement of the WSIS-GC in the Highway Africa workshop (which covers developing sustainable networks and capacity building/regional activities) arose because; the need to inform women journalists on how to cover ICT issues is a focal area for both organisations.

The WSIS-GC in preparation for this workshop sought to identify the needs of women journalists when covering gender and ICT issues; specific difficulties women journalists face in covering such issues; and to ascertain how it (the GC) could meet those needs or reduce those barriers.

Some of the needs of women journalists when covering gender and ICT issues as identified and articulated by Brenda Zulu and Nakkazi Esther, two female journalists based in Zambia and Kenya respectively, include: apathy of newspaper owners or editors who insist that ICT issues do not sell newspapers and that covering such issues only drive donor agendas (this stems from the belief that news agencies are profit making ventures and do not exist to satisfy donor requirements).

Specific difficulties female journalists face in covering these issues include: little interest in or understanding of ICT issues on the part of editors which affects the number of published stories; women journalists see ICT issues as technical (difficult to understand) not development issues; limited or no access to the internet, mobile phones etc for research purposes; and where there is access to these facilities, the cost of using such facilities is prohibitive.

Some suggestions have been presented on how the GC can address and assist in alleviating these challenges. They include: inviting women journalists to join the GC; encouraging women journalists to get email addresses so that they can participate in online discussions etc; lobbying and advocating to establish equipped resource centres in Africa; helping media organise gender-sensitive workshops; supporting the media by sponsoring ICT related columns in print media; explaining or simplifying terminology used in the sector; sharing secondary benefits of ICT facilities etc.

➤ **Workshop Objectives**

The key objective for the WSIS-GC is to increase its exposure in the region and form sustainable networks with different stakeholders in the journey to making a positive impact on the lives of men and women, especially marginalised women; by supporting and/or participating in regional activities such as the Highway Africa Workshop.

Other specific objectives are to:

- Share current success stories from the region and optimise benefits from existing and planned initiatives;
- Promote active involvement of female journalists in the use of ICT facilities in order to ensure participation in online discussion forums; and
- Provide delegates with technical information that meets their currently identified needs.

➤ **Expected Outcomes**

The main outcomes of the workshop are the following:

- Engage colleagues who actively work on ICT and development issues within the Africa region to participate in the regional meetings and PrepComs towards Tunis 2005.
- Reenergise other individuals and organisations about ICT and development issues within the region.
- Discuss and agree on topical issues for online discussion forums to be conducted after the workshop to foster regular email and internet usage as well as to keep delegates informed on developments in this sector.
- Introduce supportive tools as developed by external partners – e.g. The Engendering ICT Toolkit, A World bank initiative.

It is hoped that:

- Women journalists will be more secure and confident in covering gender and ICT issues after the workshop.
- Women journalists will join the WSIS Gender Caucus and help advocate for integration of women's rights and gender equality in the WSIS process.
- Women journalists will help communicate and disseminate works of the WSIS Gender Caucus to communities, national governments and policy making bodies using their different mediums.

➤ **Who Should Attend?**

The training session is open to all women media journalists based in the Africa region who are attending the Highway Africa workshop at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa from 16 to 18 September 2004.

Colleagues who are interested to know what the WSIS-GC is doing and who wish to get involved in activities towards Tunis 2005 are also welcome.

➤ **Workshop Theme**

The workshop theme **“How can women journalists cover ICT issues?”** will be presented through an oral presentation, case studies and discussions around three (3) sub-themes.

Over the two-hour workshop, delegates will be taken through the subject matter by assessing the current situation, describing a desired or future scenario and indicating in what ways the GC can assist in achieving that future scenario (i.e. the way forward).

Sub-theme 1 – “The Current Situation”

Focus – introduction to the WSIS-GC; current success stories from around the world with a focus on Africa; statistics of ICT users (women as a percentage of total users in different African countries); existing initiatives – The Engendering ICT Toolkit, a World bank initiative and other workshops happening concurrently at this conference that

address technical issues – delegates should endeavour to attend such workshops in the future to gain the required understanding of the terminology used in the sector.

Sub-theme 2 – “The Desired or Future Scenario”

Focus – recommendations on how success stories discussed in the current situation can be adapted to each delegate’s situation or environment.

Sub-theme 3 – “The Way Forward”

Focus – delegates should please think of concrete ways in which the GC can assist in realising the desired state.

➤ **Conference Format, Publications and Language**

The themes will be presented primarily through a general session, where the first theme will be covered in 20 minutes and the other two themes in 40 minutes each. There will be a question and answer session in the 20 minutes. A meeting report that documents the discussion and recommendations will be disseminated to other partners via the GC website. English is the working language of the workshop and will be used for all printed material, presentations and discussions.

Questions and Feedback on this concept document can be directed to:

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