

Press note on
South Asian Regional Consultations on 'Gender in Information Society'
in preparation for the
World Summit on the Information Society (2003-2005)

The 'World Summit on the Information Society' (WSIS) conducted by the UN will be held on 11th and 12 December at Geneva. World leaders from governments and the civil society will lay out the global framework for taking forward the opportunities provided by the emergence of the Information Society, as well as meet the challenges posed by it. Earlier UN world summits include the Rio summit on environment and Beijing summit on women.

A salient feature of this world summit has been that a very elaborate process of consultation with the civil society and other stakeholders is being officially carried out. Datamation Foundation, an Indian NGO, and the Gender Caucus for the WSIS are holding a South Asian Regional Consultations on 'Gender in Information Society', to develop recommendations for the WSIS on this issue. Taking in all the inputs the summit will adopt a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action.

As with the earlier UN summits, the outcome from this summit will have a major impact on policy, activity and attitudes of governments, multi-lateral organizations, civil society bodies and other key stakeholders in their role in transformation towards an Information Society. The market thinking can also be expected to pick up vital cues from the meeting and thus be influenced substantially.

UN bodies like the UNIFEM, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP; InfoDev-The World Bank; International Organizations viz. Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP); various central government ministries including the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Planning Commission, Registrar General of India (Ministry of Home Affairs); and other institutions in area of women studies like the Centre for Women Development Studies (CWDS) and the S.N.D.T Women's University and Civil Society Organizations viz. Dr. Reddy's Foundation and Development Alternatives are partnering the consultations.

A large number of Indian Govt. officials, multi-lateral and bi-lateral donor agencies including UN officials; Govt. officials and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan are expected to participate in the Consultations.

Sessions will be held on the gender issues involved in employing ICTs for economic empowerment, for political participation, in areas of health and of education, in media, in e-governance and the interaction of the ICTs with culture.

The consultations among the experts in the area will be focused and outcome oriented. The chief objectives are to build awareness and capacity for addressing gender issues in the information age; to develop recommendations for the WSIS, as well for Indian governments, UN and other multi-lateral bodies, civil society organizations and the private sector; and to begin a process of creating a standing institutional arrangement for taking up gender issues in the context of the emerging information society. A working paper on the "South Asian Regional Gender and ICT Perspective" and a set of proposed indicators to track the impact of ICTs on Gender shall be tabled and deliberated .

The second phase of the World Summit on Information Society will take place in Tunis in 2005.