

“Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality: Building on the Agreed Conclusions of the 67th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)”

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Ambassadors, leaders, delegates at this important debate,

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women Geneva, celebrating its 50 Year Anniversary this year, has been active since the First World Conference on Women. It is more and more active in debates to obtain equal rights for women and girls. Our annual contribution to CSW as part of government delegations, writing clear statements, hosting, and speaking at side and parallel events, always bringing voices, needs and resources of our local chapters -has proven the value of the civil society voices at the table.

In February, we organized a Breakfast Briefing w Ambassadors of 14 countries, UN women and CEDAW to listen to their specific concerns around IT, to identify the outstanding issues, and to begin to consider collaboration for rectification. We learned the face of the multitude of obstacles in different countries, and we all nodded in agreement and mutual understanding of the problem. Last March, at CSW 67 our Geneva Consultation Day we brought-UN Women, ITU, UNICEF and again many CSO experts and practitioners together to brainstorm around the digital issues and possible solutions.

Girls and women must be enabled to use digital platforms as tools for expression, for educational opportunities, and future jobs, but also for civil and political engagement. They must have the accessibility that is appropriate for them, funding available for them, with their dignity and security ensured. They must be encouraged to become designers, developers, coders, and to pursue STEM fields. Parents, communities, all of society must all get this message in order that youth and people in remote localities, all, have access to the opportunities of this digital era.

As technology extends human reach, care must be taken to ensure that it extends, not disrupts, the moral order in which human life flourishes. Different views on language cannot be an obstacle to our larger goals. Never have there been so many opportunities for positive human creativity to influence change - and in working together to do so: the SDG's, Culture of Peace, Human Rights and Environmental concerns- for example. But the solutions to accelerate gender equality in the digital age can never be sustainable if half the population is not included in designing and realizing them, and still, not everyone realizes that.

The debate at this year's CSW brought us into contact with new opportunities, envisaging new solutions to old problems; ITU, Girls in Tech, UN Women and UNICEF programs have incredibly developed tools and resources that can be tapped into- anywhere. We NGO's, as the liaison between government /institutions and civil society must see that these opportunities are widely recognized, and seized.

Yes, gains have been made in for rural, indigenous, disabled, and widowed women, but how can we ensure those global recommendations (Agreed Conclusions) are reaching local communities, in an adequate language and form so that they can be best put into practice, and with necessary support and encouragement? The difference will be made, not in the halls of the United Nations. The “methods of work” debate does not end with NGO's having access to government delegations and meetings, but only when the tasks are completed.

We, government, United Nations, and NGO's must have the same critical thinking, tenacity and passion to go full circle: until all girls and women realize how much more fulfilled in life, valued in society, and impactful in their pursuits, they can be. It begins by listening attentively, as we are doing here today, and

especially when we have differing views. Only in this way can we guarantee the full development and advancement of women & girls to exercise and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Recommendations

- Guarantee equal access to education
- Eliminate gender disparities in education
- Encourage education and vocational training in the fields of science and technology for all women and girls.
- Follow-up in collaboration with Geneva institutions (HRC, CEDAW) on the Agreed Conclusions and CSW language
- NGO CSW Breakfast briefings/ interactive roundtables with governments and IO leaders
- Begin working on messaging for CSW68, a theme very relevant to our committee members.