



Socialist International Women

SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL WOMEN

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Rural Areas, Media and ICT - New challenges and More Opportunities for Women's Empowerment

RESOLUTION

The valuable contribution of rural women is recognised as critical to implementing the economic, environmental and social changes required for successful sustainable development. Women and girl children in many rural areas work extremely hard to perform vital community roles in addition to providing essential social nourishment by caring for children and other family members. Millions of rural women are solely responsible for activities such as farming, animal rearing and collecting food and water. And yet, rural women are among the most impoverished human beings on the planet and continue to suffer extreme deprivation on a daily basis.

The strategic use of information and communication technology (ICT), such as using mobile phones to access education and the internet to share agricultural and healthcare knowledge, are proven powerful ways to connect, educate and empower women in remote rural areas. Access to resources such as videos, audio recordings and Skype face-to-face technology make the world a much closer community where learning, advice and support can be at your fingertips even if you're in a tiny, remote village. These technologies can be life-saving, as a means of spreading the word of imminent danger. They can be life-enhancing too, in terms of the knowledge that can be gained and the friendships that can be developed. ICT is also a means of enabling women to increase their earning potential and gain financial independence - working around their family care commitments - by setting up online businesses. Overall, the opportunities for life-changing advancements for rural women are vast and can be tailored to exactly match local needs.

The power of ICT is its potential for enabling widespread change to occur extremely swiftly. This is why it is an essential factor in increasing momentum towards the achievement of gender equality. It is entirely realistic to say that ICT has the potential to positively change the lives of millions of women and girls by 2020. This is not just in terms of education and health, but also in terms of the kinds of jobs women can choose to do. ICT is not going away. It is a permanent feature of the modern world and also the modern job market. ICT skills and knowledge are absolutely essential to ensure that women and girls remain informed and capable of participation in their regions and on the global stage. This is true whether they are in rural or urban environments.

The current challenge is that access to ICT and items such as mobile phones remains very uneven from region to region. Some areas are making great strides forward, but many regions are not. This leaves many of the poorest and most vulnerable women and girls left far behind, isolated and unable to take control of their lives. Also, the costs of new technologies mean that for many women the opportunity for grassroots support and empowerment is simply not affordable.

The cultures and traditions of some developing countries remain heavily gender biased against women and girls in all aspects of social and economic independence and political participation. Ensuring progress towards gender equal access to ICT is an essential factor in the continuing struggle towards achieving true gender equality. One vital area in which Internet and media technologies can be immensely useful is in the media. Video footage, interviews and news reports can graphically highlight gender inequality issues that can be discussed and shared online worldwide. The media has already shown the struggles and suffering of women and women in all of their painful reality, which has been one of the most effective ways of creating the political will to create lasting change. However, there is still more work to be done to mainstream the gender perspective in the media, which often reproduces stereotypes and discrimination, generating symbolic violence.

ICT is also an immensely powerful tool in harnessing the collective power of women quickly and effectively, particularly within social media, where violations – and successes – can be widely shared at very little cost. For example, social media has proven to be immensely effective at continuing the pressure on governments and communities to change by highlighting the realities of violence against women. This has helped local and national women’s groups to get their message out and to gather strength and support from around the world. This continues to encourage communities and governments to take action, provide funding and implement real and lasting change.

In addition, while social and cultural factors are certainly relevant in the distribution and access to ICT for women and girls, the first priority is to ensure that ICT is available at all. In far too many cases it is not. In this age of breath-taking technological advances and decreasing costs of basic ICT equipment it is now time to lift our rural sisters and brothers up into the twenty first century.

Socialist International (SIW) is strongly committed to harnessing and encouraging the political will to push through the barriers preventing change and making ICT accessible and affordable for rural women and men worldwide. SIW remains committed to actively supporting the promotion of gender equality worldwide, including access to ICT equipment and training, and encouraging the social and political changes necessary to create lasting change.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically mention ICT as a vital element in achieving sustainable development and gender equality. Socialist International Women is committed to and supportive of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere, which includes the specific goal of ensuring both men and women have equal access to ‘appropriate new technology’.

SIW is equally supportive of SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation, which includes the following specific goal:

- *Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.*

The SIW asserts that gender equal access to ICT and appropriate funding support is vital in enabling women and girls to participate on a parity democracy basis with men in the

sustainable development of their communities and regions, for the benefit of all women and men worldwide.

The Socialist International Women (SIW) calls on all Governments, Member Parties of the Socialist International and NGOs with beliefs and core values similar to the SIW, to encourage and support gender sensitive budgeting practices to enable all women and girls to fully realise the benefits of ICT access and skills, and enable their participation in the decision making processes of nations and regions on policies and interventions regarding sustainable development in their regions.

The SIW calls for urgent action to:

- *Promote* the inclusion and development of gender sensitive policies with regard to access to ICT equipment, such as mobile phones, for rural women and girls in local and national party manifestos and literature.
- *Urge* governments to guarantee the provision of affordable ICT solutions and equipment, such as mobile phones and Internet access, for rural women in their regions.
- *Encourage* the allocation of funding for gender sensitive ICT initiatives and strong political focus on the allocation of gender sensitive budgets to support the development and training of rural women and girls in ICT skills.
- *Challenge* gender discriminatory practices in relation to ICT access and skills training and encourage support for gender sensitive changes that take into account the needs and priorities of rural women and girls.
- *Initiate* discussion of the benefits of developing ICT infrastructures for the economies and individual wellbeing of communities and regions and the value of encouraging rural women to participate in the use of ICT for the benefit of all.
