

Inclusive and Sustainable Development: Gender as a Critical Variable

Statement by Shirley Malcom, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Co-Chair, Gender Advisory Board, UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development, Seventeenth session, CSTD, May 13, 2014

Since its initial convening in 1993 as the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), considering the gender dimension has always been an aspect of its work. In fact, even before establishment as the Commission, the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development and its Advisory Committee, created after the Vienna Conference on Science and Technology for Development in 1979, considered “gender” within their work. In 1983 the Advisory Committee partnered with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in convening a workshop on science, technology and women to support the 1985 UN Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi. The report from the Mt. Holyoke conference of 1983, *Science, Technology and Women: A World Perspective*, reflected many of the same themes that engage us today.

In one of its first decisions in 1993 the Commission proposed to provide input on science and technology for development to the UN Summits to be held in 1995: the social summit and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. The Gender Working Group of UNCSTD that was formed to enable that contribution to the Beijing conference evolved into the Gender Advisory Board, created in 1995 to support implementation of the work of the Commission in a manner that was “gender aware” and consistent with United Nations goals to mainstream gender concerns in all aspects of its work.

The Commission has always had the advantage of access to an advisory structure on gender to inform its work. As CSTD considers the role of science, technology and innovation (STI) in the post-2015 development agenda, a gender lens is critical to conceptualizing “a way forward.”

When the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were articulated it was clear to many that these were unlikely to be accomplished without a focus on science and technology; it was also unlikely that these would be realized without specific attention to “women’s issues and needs.” In point of fact, it is important to note that, across the MDGs, there were goals where women were the focus, others where women were the specific target and others where they were primary actors. But in no case could any of the goals be achieved without considering a gender dimension. It is important to learn from the lessons of the MDGs as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are considered and the role of science, technology and innovation (STI) in addressing these is discussed. STI options as well as policy options will have to be considered, hopefully with the application of a gender lens.

The theme papers prepared for the 17th Annual Session highlight a number of areas where STI can contribute to inclusive and sustainable development, where application of a gender lens will be critical:

- **Developing innovation capacity** that allows a nation to meet the basic needs of people (food, water, sanitation, health, housing and transportation, etc.). Women play different roles in families and communities, thus there are differential access, opportunity, impacts and outcomes that emerge from the options pursued and STI choices made in development.
- **Invention, innovation and entrepreneurship** at the grassroots level, stimulated by local needs and tapping into local knowledge systems, including women's local knowledge systems.
- **Promoting inclusive growth** through a system of supporting business development, including in the informal sector where women predominate, with inclusive STI education and capacity building.

Developing innovation capacity perforce means having the institutions, organizations and people who can support knowledge creation, application and dissemination. It also requires building local capacity to utilize these applications to address basic needs. Talent for STI must be developed at every level and include girls and boys, women and men. This talent pool will be needed to support development of sustainable solutions to the challenges faced in areas such as health, environment, food security and nutrition, water, energy, sanitation and much more, most of which fall into the sphere of women's activities. STI education is central and must be provided from primary and secondary to technician and vocational to graduate levels.

While some STI solutions are appropriate at national levels (such as those related to providing broadband, mobile networks or vaccination programs) others are most reasonably accomplished regionally (such as transportation, conservation and biodiversity protection). The critical issue is that solutions and products appear at every level (household and community to national, regional and global solutions). Solutions to address basic needs often equate to solutions to improve the lives of women, benefiting families and communities; so often a gender focus is adopted on small scale solutions. But STI options at national and regional levels can also have disparate impacts on the lives of women and men, thus, it is essential that consultative processes involve women and men and that a gender lens be applied in constructing a development agenda and setting priorities. STI options may also involve utilizing and scaling the local knowledge that women bring into the larger STI enterprise or in deploying distributed systems (such as in more localized energy solutions in use of solar, wind or biomass).

There is a need to make the issues surrounding the "gender dimension" of STI in development much more visible, to share success stories and to urge inclusive processes, "gender aware" decision making and agenda setting and to harness the talent of women and men in providing

inclusive and sustainable development solutions. We therefore urge application of a gender lens to STI based development solutions to take advantage of the “insights” such a framing can yield.

Re-framing Sustainable Development

GenderInSITE is a strategy for supporting inclusive and sustainable development by emphasizing the need to engage the talent of women and men, girls and boys in science, innovation, technology and engineering (SITE) and to utilize SITE to improve women’s lives, thus accruing benefits to families and communities. A major focus is on building awareness and on affecting policies. It is important to engage policymakers in discussing how STI and policy options are considered in the course of planning and implementing development strategies; this can have positive impact on all by encouraging a measured consideration of the gender dimension and gender impact of choices and decisions. Supported by Sida, the Gender Advisory Board participates in GenderInSITE with a number of other groups working at the intersection of STI, development and gender, such as, TWAS, the Organization of Women Scientists for the Developing World, UNESCO and others. Regional focal points have been established for Latin America, East Africa and Southern Africa, and funding is being sought for establishing other focal points across the developing world.

It is important to share widely the case studies that are emerging of the gender dimension, such as those examples put forward during past consideration of specific topics by CSTD in this forum. Last year’s discussion of transportation related to urban and peri-urban environments, for example, noted that different patterns of usage of transport by women and men needed to be factored into plans for sustainable transportation solutions. Previous discussions in this forum on land use, access to ICTs, water, and energy, have all yielded examples of differential access or different responsibilities and impacts. Many of these are captured in UNCTAD’s publication, *Applying a Gender Lens to Science, Technology and Innovation*.

Women’s Empowerment through an STI Lens

In the report from the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the CSTD was noted as a body that possessed special knowledge of STI solutions, where the potential to share lessons learned might enhance the capacity of CSW to realize the benefits of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and their applications as applied to women’s empowerment.

“The Commission recognizes the need for the compilation and sharing of good practice examples and lessons learned in mainstreaming a gender perspective into science, technology and innovation policies and programmes, with a view to replicating and scaling up successes, and in this regard looks forward to any steps or actions that could be taken by the relevant United Nations bodies, especially the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.”

CSW also noted places where STI could be made responsive to women's needs as follows:

- To deliver improvements in “infrastructures and sectors such as energy, transportation, agriculture, nutrition, health, water and sanitation and information and communications technology, in order, inter alia, to eradicate poverty, promote social development and achieve women’s economic empowerment”
- To build awareness of “women in science and technology...and report on the differential impact of science and technology on women and men;”
- To “encourage the integration of a gender perspective in the science and technology curricula throughout all stages of education and continuous learning, and the use of gender-based analysis and gender impact assessments in research and development in science and technology, and promote a user driven approach to technology development in order to increase the relevance and usefulness of advancements in science and technology for both women and men.”
- To “respect, preserve and maintain women’s traditional knowledge and innovation while recognizing the potential of rural and indigenous women to contribute to the production of science and technology and of new knowledge to improve their lives and those of their families and communities.”
- To “formulate and implement public policies that increase women’s and girls’ access to digital technologies...”

ICTs: Enabling Inclusive Development

The second theme paper specifically underscores the role of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in inclusive development. It also notes the presence of a digital divide, both among countries and for marginalized groups, including women. We wish to call out a few particular examples of instances where incorporation of a gender lens can direct further work:

- Ownership – There are concerns about women’s ownership of devices so that women are not dependent on others for access. If access is only through, for example, a male family member or cybercafés, this restricts women’s access to useful information and their ability to communicate freely.
- Content - Women need more control over content, both that they need and that which they need to be able to restrict.
- Language access - Women need ICT and mobile based content in formats and languages they can understand for education and information that can support them in their roles as actors in promoting sustainable development.

A Way Forward

We commend the Commission for its work to apply STI in the post-2015 development agenda, including access to and use of ICTs to support that development. We appreciate the progress that has been made in incorporating a “gender dimension” in its work. While recognizing that more remains to be done in moving forward, we are pleased to assist CSTD in charting a way forward in supporting inclusive and sustainable development, taking into account the needs of women and men, girls and boys, and utilizing the talents of all.