

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD), twenty-second session
Geneva, 13-17 May 2019**

**Group discussion on priority theme 1: The impact of rapid technological
change on the sustainable development**

Group 2: Gender perspectives of rapid technological change

Summary

Wednesday, 15 May 2019

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

**CSTD Group Discussions on Priority Theme 1:
The impact of rapid technological change on sustainable development
Group 2: Gender perspectives of rapid technological change**

Summary

The group discussion on “Gender perspectives of rapid technological change” considered three broad topics: 1) examples of new and emerging technologies that advance gender equality in your countries; 2) the main challenges women and girls face which technologies do not yet address; and 3) how the international community can ensure that women and girls are fully integrated in discussion on rapid technological change.

Regarding **new and emerging technologies that advance gender equality**, participants noted that for technologies to advance gender equality, gender dimensions need to be considered from the planning phase of technology design, also taking into account women’s rights. Gender can be also “retrofitted” where it was not considered from the onset. On this note, the group agreed that AI and gender are cross-cutting issues and the group discussion on gender should have been integrated to the group discussion on national AI strategies.

Some of the concrete examples that came up during the discussion include:

- Mobile money, that provides easier access to financial services for women. It should be noted, however, that globally, there is a gender gap in the uptake of mobile money between men and women, with higher user rates among men.
- Microcredits, which were more successful for women than for men. They provided access to finance for women entrepreneurs, which is a huge challenge for women. Both in developing and developed countries access to finance for women remains a challenge.
- HPV vaccine, that provides protection against HPV virus which is one of the main causes of cervical cancer for women. The vaccine addresses an important women’s health issue. Recently, it was also discovered that HPV virus is connected to tonsil cancer for both men and women – so the vaccine can actually benefit both men and women.
- Existing technologies and platforms, that people are familiar with, with new applications also need to be considered. One example are mobile applications, where women can report locations of harassment. Social media can also be used to advance gender issues. Its advantage is that it provides anonymity. One example is Gabriela, a network of organizations in the Philippines. It launched a chatbot on Facebook where women can report sexual harassment, can get legal advice, and advice on how to report to HR.

Regarding the main **challenges women and girls face that technologies do not address**, the discussion mentioned that women in developing countries simply have less free time at their disposal (time scarcity for women is also true globally). If they had more free time, they might be able to use more of the services like mobile money. Literacy and connectivity are also among the most important challenges. However, we should keep in mind that country contexts are very important, some issues are global, while others are country-specific.

A recent study showed that there might be a gender paradox in STEM fields. World-wide, girls and boys are scoring equally in mathematics, but girls have higher scores in areas like literature. Girls have a comparative advantage in humanities – and they tend to choose disciplines where they are best. We have to encourage girls to take up STEM jobs and careers, by showing them that job opportunities are better there.

In addition, there is the issue of “not feeling in the right place”, an experience that influences girls’ decisions to leave STEM studies and careers.

Some of the concrete examples of challenges that have not been solved by new technologies:

- Water and sanitation. Women in developing countries spend a lot of time carrying water for sanitation purposes. It is a large burden – girls may not attend school for this. New technologies have not contributed anything to this issue. Being a “low-tech” matter in mostly non-affluent areas, this problem is largely ignored. Another related issue is the lack of low-cost solutions for menstrual hygiene, that can keep girls out of school during their periods. In addition, in rural areas there is no public dialogue on these issues. How can we engage girls and women to actively participate in designing new technologies? Human-centered design is very important and as well as to design technologies together with the end-users.
- Agriculture. Women are undervalued and underreported in agricultural activities. In rice farming, for example, 55 percent of labor is done by girls and women. They are invisible, and therefore, technology cannot address their problems. We need to address their invisibility to develop technologies to advance gender equality.
- Gender-based violence. Technology does not address gender-based violence, sometimes it even enhances it. We need technologies that address harassment and protect women online from human trafficking, harassment, fraud, etc. We need to empower women to be part of the solutions in this regard.

Finally, regarding the **role of international community, including the CSTD**, the following points were mentioned:

- Inspired by the aspirations of the “50 Breakthroughs technologies for the SDGs”, CSTD could develop a list of 50 challenges of women and girls that urgently need technological solutions. Men and women could contribute to solving these challenges by submitting their ideas and solutions.
- Scaling up and mobilizing finance. International community needs to focus on scaling up innovation. We need to engage more with the private sector to bring them to the table to make solutions viable and sustainable in the long-term. Male entrepreneurs also need to understand that they can contribute to solving women’s problems. Beneficiaries also need to be included.
- Gender audit in technology assessments. We need to look at the impact of emerging technologies: what are the challenges, what is the broader impact on women, in what way women and girls can be integrated, or why they cannot be? The international community needs to develop processes that make discussions on gender more intentional. For example, we do not have an assessment of the impact of electrification projects on women and children in rural areas. These projects need to be designed to solve the problems of women and girls. The international community could bring together private sector entities that could develop appropriate technologies while considering gender dimensions at the same time.