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United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women
Expert group meeting on 'Gender, science and technology'
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AIDE-MEMOIRE

Division for the Advancement of Women
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations, New York
Fax: (212) 963-3463
daw@un.org
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work for 2010-2014, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will consider 'Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work' as its priority theme during its fifty-fifth session in 2011. In order to contribute to a fuller understanding of the issue and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will convene an expert group meeting (EGM) on 'Gender, science and technology' from 28 September to 1 October 2010 in Paris, France.

II. Conceptual framework for the EGM

A. Background

2. Commitments on women's and girls' access to and participation in science and technology have been made by Governments at the international level. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), calls on Governments and all stakeholders to increase women's access to and retention in science and technology, including by adapting curricula and teaching material and by increasing the share of women teachers in scientific and technological disciplines at all levels of education (paras. 82 (g) and 83 (f)). In addition, stakeholders should provide information on the availability and benefits of training programmes in these fields and funds for special programmes in science and technology to advance opportunities for women (paras. 82 (c), (e) and 85 (b)).

3. The Platform also urges stakeholders to promote gender-sensitive and women-centred health research, treatment and technology, and to link traditional and indigenous knowledge with modern medicine (para. 109 (b)), as well as to create training, research and resource centres that disseminate environmentally sound technologies to women (para. 258 (b)(v)). It emphasizes the need to undertake legislative and administrative reforms to give women equal rights with men to economic resources such as new technology (para. 165 (e)). In addition, it calls for outreach programmes to inform low-income and poor women, particularly in rural and remote areas, of opportunities for market and technology access, and to provide assistance in taking advantage of such opportunities (para. 173 (c)).

4. The outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) highlights the need to encourage and support the education of girls in science, mathematics, new technologies, including information technologies, and technical subjects, and to encourage women, including through career counseling, to seek employment in high growth and high-wage sectors and jobs (para. 82 (i)). It also stresses the importance of providing access to and control over technology, particularly for women living in poverty and for women entrepreneurs (paras. 74 (a) and 82 (g)).

5. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) recognizes, in the Geneva Plan of Action (2003) and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (2005), the importance of promoting women's participation in information and communications technologies (ICT),

the challenges of climate change. It has also emerged as an important means for countries to improve productivity and competitiveness and to create decent work opportunities, including in new sectors such as green and knowledge-based economies.

11. The contribution of science and technology to the internationally agreed development goals can be accelerated by taking into account its gender dimensions. For instance, greater access to and use of existing technologies, as well as better products that respond to women's needs, can increase women's efficiency in carrying out productive and reproductive tasks. Acquiring science and technology education and training can empower women in all aspects of their lives. Eliminating barriers to women's employment in science and technology fields will further the goal of full employment and decent work.

12. Women's access to science and technology varies from country to country. Women who live in developed nations tend to enjoy the benefits of a wide range of modern technologies. Their access to information and communications technologies (ICT), for instance, has improved over the last decade, and there remains only a small gender gap in internet access in OECD countries. Patterns of ICT use between women and men, however, appear to diverge.[1]

13. The situation differs in developing countries, where many women have limited access to scientific and technological knowledge and applications. For instance, in least developed countries, every fourth married woman has an unmet need for modern contraceptive methods.[2] A woman is 23 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than a man if she lives in Africa, 24 per cent if she lives in the Middle East, and 37 per cent if she lives in South Asia.[3] Such restrictions limit opportunities to reduce the disproportionate burden of unpaid work on women and to increase women's involvement and efficiency in productive activities.

14. Some groups of women are at a particular disadvantage. For instance, poor women living in rural areas could benefit from greater access to technology as they are responsible for a range of time- and labour-intensive tasks, such as food production, agro-processing, and water and fuel collection. However, technology such as lighter agricultural equipment, solar lamps, mechanized grain mills, or energy-efficient stoves too often remains out of their reach.

15. A number of factors limit women's access to and use of technology. Lack of education and training, and female illiteracy, can make it more challenging for women to take advantage of technologies. Women's disproportionate household and care responsibilities may leave them with little free time to explore technologies and their potential benefits. Socio-cultural norms can constrain women from using certain technologies. Financial and institutional barriers may also place restrictions on women's capability to rent or purchase technologies.

16. In addition, scientific and technological research and development may not adequately take into account the needs of women and girls. Feminist critics have denounced the existence of gender biases in scientific research. A well-documented illustration was the exclusion of

[1] OECD (2008). ICTs and Gender. PowerPoint Presentation at the OECD Expert Meeting held in Oslo, Norway, 2-3 June 2008.
[2] United Nations (2009). *The Millennium Development Goal Report 2009*. New York: United Nations.
[3] GSM Association (2010). *Women and Mobiles: A Global Opportunity*.

20. Educational and career choices are shaped by a range of factors, including students' performance, enjoyment and interest in given subject matters. There appears to be little basis

scientists and engineers in the European Union (EU) were women in 2007.[14] Similarly, entrepreneurship in innovative sectors tends to be dominated by men.

24. Women scientists and engineers face a number of obstacles in the workplace. Like many other working women, they grapple with work-life balance issues and unequal pay, but they also have to confront specific challenges, such as being isolated in a predominantly male

men have a higher success rate in obtaining funding in a majority of countries. There was, however, no clear relationship between women's success rate in obtaining research funds and their relative representation in a given field.[21]

29. It is important to overcome the various barriers to women's participation in science and technology employment. These dynamic fields are a significant source of job creation, and help widen the range of decent work opportunities available to women, thereby reducing occupational segregation and the gender pay gap. In addition, women represent an important pool of talent, and foregoing their contribution restricts the volume and quality of innovation. Scientific and technological innovation, however, is crucial to accelerate progress toward development goals, and paying due attention to its many gender dimensions is necessary to maximize its potential. In particular, it is imperative to include a gender equality dimension in national science, technology and innovation policies, and to ensure that women participate in shaping this agenda.

III. Objective of the EGM

30. The EGM will explore the gender dimensions of science and technology, and identify policies and programmes that can accelerate pr

34. The documentation for the meeting will include:

- A background paper commissioned by the Division for the Advancement of Women, outlining the major issues to be discussed;
- Expert papers prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise;
- Papers prepared by observers, which will be made available but not formally presented at the EGM.

VI. Organization

35. The EGM will be organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and will be hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, France, from 28 September to 1 October 2010.

36. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.

37. The EGM will meet in plenary and in working groups. Presentations by the experts in plenary will create the framework for discussions. The plenary will be followed by in-depth discussion of specific issues in working groups.

VII. Expected outcome

38. The EGM will prepare a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations. The report will be made available at the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women.