Gender Issues and Barriers to Information and Communications Technologies

Sponsored by
The Commonwealth of Learning, The International Development
Research Centre and
The New Zealand Agency for International Development

June 24-26, 2002
Ottawa, Canada

SUMMARY MEETING REPORT

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**Gender Issues and Barriers to Information and
Communications Technologies
Ottawa, June 24-26, 2002
Summary Meeting Report**

Background

Women in the developing world are usually well-represented when opportunities for
education and training are offered through open and distance learning (ODL)
methodologies. However, with the increased use of information and communications
technologies (ICTs), it is feared that this trend may be reversed and that women may
become marginalised when education systems use ICTs for delivery of ODL courses.

To explore these concerns, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) contracted an
environmental scan on the research and information available on issues pertaining to
women and their access to ICTs, especially in the education and training sectors. Little
information was found through this scan, and as a result in an effort to explore these
concerns, COL organised, in conjunction with other agencies and organisations, meetings
in the four developing regions of the Commonwealth.

Following from these meetings, consultants were engaged to write a synthesis of the
reports from the four regional meetings, as well as to update the current situation through
case studies.   Representatives from the four regions were then invited to Ottawa to
review the synthesis report as well as to make suggestions and recommendations about
the way forward. This document is a report of that summary meeting.

Meeting Objectives

The meeting had three primary objectives:

1. to review and provide input in order to finalise the synthesis report, *Women and
    ICTs for Open and Distance Learning: Lessons Learned from Commonwealth
    Countries in the Developing World* by Lyndsay Green and Lawry Trevor-
    Deutsch. (Draft Four, May 27, 2002).
2. to comment on the case studies in the report and determine their suitability, as
    well as provide additional studies which would assist in updating the report.
3. to discuss and develop the key elements of an international conference on gender
    and ICTs tentatively scheduled for 2003.

Meeting Participants

The participants to the meeting came from the four developing regions of the
Commonwealth, as well as from Canada and New Zealand. In most cases, the
participants had attended the meeting in their region, and had contributed a country paper
to the earlier discussions held at the regional meetings.

The Participant List including contact details is attached as Appendix A.

Meeting Proceedings

During the meeting, presentations were given which stimulated discussions on various topics. The meeting agenda is located in Appendix B, and the following notes reflect the decisions that were taken with respect to finalising the synthesis report.

1. *Finalisation of Synthesis Report (first section)*

Susan Phillips of COL presented a summary of the regional meetings held in Tanzania (May 2000), India (November 1998), Barbados (November 1999), and New Zealand (May 2001). The outline of her presentation is attached as Appendix C. The reports of these meetings and the associated country research papers were the inputs for the synthesis report (first section).

Lyndsay Green presented a summary of the synthesis report (first section). The outline of her presentation is attached as Appendix D. Over the days of the meeting, she facilitated group discussions that reviewed the report, including an item-by-item review of the barriers and the strategies as presented in the report. Detailed input and feedback were provided by the group, which will be incorporated into the final synthesis report. In addition, the group developed a checklist based on the report findings for use by project funders, implementers and decision-makers (Appendix E).

The following is a summary of the group's decisions:

- One of the most significant barriers to women's access to education (with or without ICTs) is the lack of relevancy of the content. When learning strategies fail to value women's knowledge, wisdom and experience, the education is not perceived as valuable to them. Because *Relevancy* is so significant to women's use of ICTs for ODL, the group decided it should be given increased emphasis in the document by including it in the *Barriers to the Education of Women*, and in the section, *Additional Barriers with ICTs*. The order should be reversed to discuss *Relevancy* first.

- *Mobility* should be included in the *Barriers to the Education of Women*. A combination of the impact of all the discussed factors (illiteracy, poverty, time famine and socio-cultural restrictions) can severely restrict a woman's mobility. This lack of mobility can hamper a woman's ability to benefit from educational opportunities (whether offered traditionally or through ICTs), if she needs to travel some distance to access the courses, or if the courses are offered at a time or place that is either unsafe or culturally prohibited.

- The barrier called *Access* in the draft report should be divided into *Availability* and *Usage*, with *access to technology* under *Availability* and *costs*, *skills*, *information* and *socio-cultural* under *Usage*. The new learning skills required by the move to self-directed learning should be added as a category under *Skills*.

- The Access (now *Availability*) – Technology section should more broadly reflect all the ICTs, not just the newer, computer-based ICTs.

- The Access (now *Usage*) – Costs section should include the following additional costs related to the use of ICTs for ODL – electricity/battery charges, capital costs, the high cost of obsolescence, and training costs.

- The Access (now *Usage*) – Information section should include the fact that women also need information about the broader issues around the importance of ICTs – its potential relevancy and potential capacity.

- The section *Provide Appropriate Technology* should include reference to the fact that many effective strategies use a multi-media, multi-faceted approach, sometimes combining the traditional with the modern.

- Under *Provide Equipment* add – If there is an overall message about the ideal way to provide equipment for women's use of ICTs for ODL it is, "Bring the equipment to the women."

- The section *Reduce Costs* should recommend sharing resources.

- *Increase Skills* should be re-titled *Address Skill Needs* and in this section it should be added that women should take on the role of trainer/educator. Women should be trained in such a way that they can build on their skills, and on-the-job training should be encouraged. Women should be trained not just as users. They should be trained in both hardware and software skills, as content developers, and as providers of user support and technical support. Also, how to retain skilled people in the organisation, region, or country is a challenge that needs to be addressed in any campaign that addresses skill needs.

- In the section *Provide Information and Support*, include the need to inform the broader population about the issues surrounding women's use of ICTs for ODL. Add that the information campaigns need to show the same gender-sensitivity as discussed for the ICTs themselves, and the training. Design gender-appropriate information campaigns. Use appropriate communications channels to reach women. Sensitise them to the issues through traditional channels.

- The section on *Policy Development* should include the need to integrate ICTs and gender recognition into a broad range of sectoral and regional policies. As well, ICTs and Gender policy should be developed at all levels – regional, national, local and sectoral. Also, user experience needs to be fed into the policy development.

- The section on *Research* should specify that gender should be incorporated as a research variable in all ICTs and ODL research. National surveys should be conducted on the needs of learners, the current state of ICTs provision and the

appropriateness of different ICTs for ODL. These surveys should be gender-specific and the data should be disaggregated by gender. Gender-specific databases about ODL and ICTs should be developed at all levels – local, national and regional. There is also a need to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of policies with respect to ICTs and gender. There is a need to share information about gender, ODL and ICTs, and information about successful projects in use of ICTs for ODL should be widely disseminated.

- The title of the synthesis report will be "Women and ICTs for Open and Distance Learning: Some Experiences and Strategies from the Commonwealth".

2. *Finalisation of Case Studies*

The six case studies included in the draft report were presented by meeting participants and discussed. In one case, the materials that were developed and around which the case study was written were demonstrated – Case study 7.5 was presented by Eva Rathgeber, and included a demonstration of the CD-ROM for Ugandan rural women entitled "Rural Women in Africa: Ideas for Earning Money".

After hearing the six case studies, the group concluded that, as well as having a gender component, the case studies should reflect all four regions of the Commonwealth, should incorporate a variety of technologies (not just computer-based ICTs) and should include examples of policy development. Some case studies may not be strictly categorised as ODL by some definitions but could be included if they were relevant to the topic. Using these criteria, the applicability of the six case studies was discussed and the decision made to remove two of the case studies.

In order to try and have a comprehensive cross-section of case studies, both from the regional and from the technology perspective, participants presented details of a number of additional case studies for potential inclusion in the report. After some debate, it was agreed that the following case studies should be included if possible. The person/s indicated will submit the write-up of the case study to COL.

- Virtual Conference on Information Access by Rural African Women (Dorothy Okello)
- Teleconference Centres in Africa (Florence Etta)
- Policy Development in the South Pacific (Esther Williams)
- The South Pacific Telehealth Project (Esther Williams)
- Zambia Ministry of Education Radio Project (Mildred Nkolola-Wakumelo)
- Open Learning Package on Small Business for Samoa (Emma Kruse Vaai, with overview from Jenny Williams)
- Rural Women Dry Land Farming in India - video and audio project (Jai Chandiram)
- Policy Development in the Caribbean (Lorna Callender and Avrill Crawford)
- COL-LIT Project in Zambia (Susan Phillips)

3. Development of International Conference Proposal

Susan Phillips presented items for discussion and suggestions developed by COL and IDRC for an international conference on gender and ICTs to be held in 2003. The group discussed the points raised and made some suggestions and recommendations to be taken forward for future deliberation.

4. Additional Contributions

In addition to the above discussions, David Walker of COL demonstrated examples of the use of ICTs in COL's work in the field. Florence Etta and Ramata Aw Thioune of the Acacia project of IDRC presented information about the Acacia project and contributed their expertise throughout the three days of the meeting.

The meeting closed with a poem by Lorna Callender attached as Appendix F which aptly summed up the three days and provided encouragement for the work that still needs to be done.

Appendix A

ICT Summary Meeting
Participant List

Representing the Asian Region

Dr. Gan Siowck Lee
Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs
Inti College Malaysia
Jln. BBN 12/1 Bandar Baru Nilai
71800 Negeri Sembilan
Malaysia
Phone: 60+ 6 798 2031
Fax: 60+6 799 7531
E-Mail: gansl@intimal.edu.my or siowck@slgan.pc.my

Ms. Jai Chandiram
Advisor, Government of Andhra Pradesh Kuband Proj "Mana TV"
President: International Association of Women in Radio and TV (IAWRT)
D2D Munirka
DDA Flats
New Delhi
India
Phone: 91 11 617 1259
Mobile: 98490 39168
E-Mail: jaichandiram@yahoo.co.in or jaichandiram@mantraonline.com

Representing the South Pacific Region

Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai
Academic Director/Deputy CEO
Samoa Polytechnic
PO Box 861
Apia
Samoa
Phone: 685+ 21 428/971
Fax: 685+ 25489
E-Mail: emkv@yahoo.com

Dr. Esther Williams
University Librarian
Laucala Campus
The University of the South Pacific
PO Box 1168
Suva
Fiji
Phone: 679+ 313900, Ext. 2282 or 212282
Fax: 679+ 300830
E-Mail: Williams_E@usp.ac.fj

Ms. Jane Kanas
PO Box 708
Port Vila
Vanuatu
Phone: 678+ 22748
Fax: 678+ 22633
E-Mail: kanas_j@vanuatu.usp.ac.fj

Representing the Caribbean Region

Mrs. Avrill Crawford
Project Director
Jamaica Computer Society (JCS) Education Foundation
Instructional Technology Institute (ITI)
18 Belmont Road
Kingston 5
Jamaica
Phone: 876+ 920 1899 / 929-5900
Fax: 876+ 754-9642
E-Mail: crawforda@cwjamaica.com

Mrs. Lorna A. Callender
Head
OECS Education Reform Unit (OERU)
P.O. Box 179, Villa Apartments
Morne Fortune
Castries
St. Lucia
Phone: 758+ 452-2082
Fax: 758+ 453-0841
E-Mail: lcallender@oeru.org or sunyer98@yahoo.com

Representing the African Region

Mrs. Agatha Gaisie-Nketsiah
Ag. Programme Coordinator
Public Financial Management Reform Programme
Ministry of Finance
PO Box M40
Accra
Ghana
Phone: 233+ 21 669289/20 811 8115
Fax: 233+ 21 674381
E-Mail: asgaisie@yahoo.co.uk

Dr. Mildred M. Nkolola-Wakumelo
Lecturer (Full Time – Distance Education)
Department of Literature and Languages
The University of Zambia
PO Box 32379
Lusaka
Zambia
Phone: 260+ 1 295777/8 or 292918
Fax: 260+ 1 253 952
E-Mail: mwakumelo@hss.unza.zm or mwakumelo@yahoo.com

Presenters

Dr. Eva M. Rathgeber
Joint Chair in Women's Studies
Universite d'Ottawa/Carleton University
C.P./POB 450, Succ./Stn. A
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Canada
Phone: 613 520 6644
Fax: 613 562 5994
E-Mail: rpr@sympatico.ca

Ms. Dorothy Okello
Coordinator, Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)
1950 rue Lincoln, #411
Montreal, QC H3H 2N8
E-Mail: dokello@wougnet.org

Ms. Ramata Aw Thioune
Knowledge Analyst
ACACIA – International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
BRACO/WARO
Dakar
Senegal
Phone: 221 864 00 00 ext 2221
Fax: 221 825 32 55
E-Mail: rthioune@idrc.org.sn

Dr. Florence Etta
Knowledge Analyst
Evaluation Associate
International Development Research Centre
Liaison House, State House Avenue
Box 62804
Nairobi
Kenya
Phone: 254+ 2 713 160/1
Fax: 254+ 2 711 063
E-Mail: fetta@idrc.or.ke

Mr. David Walker
Education Specialist,
  Educational Technology
The Commonwealth of Learning
1285 West Broadway, Suite 600
Vancouver, BC V6H 3X8
Canada
Phone: 604 775 8200
Fax: 604 775 8210
E-Mail: dwalker@col.org

Ms. Jenny Williams
Project Manger, Pacific Region
The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
Private Bag 31914
Lower Hutt
New Zealand
Phone: 64 4 560 5829
Fax: 64 4 560 5608
E-Mail: Jenny.Williams@openpolytechnic.ac.nz

Facilitators

Ms. Lyndsay Green
Lyndsay Green and Associates
Consultants in Applications of Learning Technologies
367 Walmer Road
Toronto, ON M5R 2Y3
Phone: 416 966 0794
Fax: 416 966 4029
Email: green@traintec.com

Ms. Susan Phillips
Education Specialist,
  Materials and Open Schooling
The Commonwealth of Learning
1285 West Broadway, Suite 600
Vancouver, BC V6H 3X8
Canada
Phone: 604 775 8200
Fax: 604 775 8210
E-Mail: sphillips@col.org

Appendix B

Agenda
Gender Issues and Barriers to ICTs
Ottawa, June 24 – 26, 2002

Day 1 – June 24

9:00   Introduction to meeting
Self-introductions

Review of regional meetings

10:30 *Coffee/Tea Break*

10:45   Review of Synthesis Report (first section)

Comments by region

12:30 *Lunch*

1:30   Comments by region (continued)

3:00   *Coffee/Tea*

3:15   Presentation – CD-ROM – for Ugandan rural women

Day 2 – June 25

9:00   Summary of comments by region

9:30   Presentation – summary of Virtual Conference on Information Access by Rural
African Women

10:30 *Coffee/Tea*

10:45   Presentation and review of case studies
Identification of gaps

Case studies to be added – review for inclusion

12:30 *Lunch*

1:30   COL in the field – projects/initiatives relating to women

2:15   Acacia Initiative - presentation

3:00   *Coffee/Tea*

3:15   Q&A session – presentations

Finalisation of additional case studies
Summary of revisions to the Synthesis report

7:00   Workshop Dinner

Day 3 – June 26

9:00   International conference – topics for discussion:
Funding
Participants
Themes
Keynote speakers
Structure, format, activities
Other suggestions/recommendations

10:30 *Coffee/Tea*

10:45   International conference – continued discussion

12:30 *Lunch*

1:30   Recommendations/next steps
Meeting summary

3:00   *Coffee/Tea*

Appendix C

Barriers Encountered by Women to Accessing ICTs

for Open/Distance Learning in the Developing Regions of the Commonwealth

Barriers Encountered by Women to Accessing ICTs

Reasons for initiative:
- increase knowledge base
- To raise awareness/advocacy
- Provide information to institutions, Lack of data/information – update and agencies, governments, NGOs, etc.
- Inform COL, others – help to make informed decisions

Summary Report: Barriers to ICTs Encountered by Women

- Review of major points made and recommendations from each meeting
- Summary of common barriers identified
- Common projects/initiatives suggested
- Next steps

Barriers to ICTs Encountered by Women – Asian Region

for the Purpose of Open and Distance Learning

Countries represented:

- Bangladesh
- India
- Malaysia
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka

Barriers identified:

- Access to hardware
- Low literacy levels
- Lack of English literacy
- Costs
- Lack of training
- Institutional barriers
- Infrastructure barriers

Recommendations:

- Increase awareness-building – through publishing reports and case studies
- Build capacity through local groups and project development
- Subsequent meetings should involve persons at all levels and from various related sectors

Draft Project Outlines

- Establishment of community radio stations
- Carry out national surveys on O/DL for women
- Organise regional workshops for O/DL providers and learners who are women

Barriers to ICTs Encountered by Women – Caribbean Region

for the Purpose of Open and Distance Learning

Countries represented:

- Barbados
- Belize
- Dominica
- Guyana
- St Kitts and Nevis
- St Lucia
- Trinidad and Tobago

Major Issues Identified:

- Gender issues with respect to ICTs should consider both men and women
- Cannot categorise people into gender specific, homogeneous groupings - educational experiences/needs vary based on social/economic circumstances and country contexts.
- ICTs are neutral tools and should not be considered in isolation

When Gender is an issue:

- Age and home environment (rural versus urban) are factors
- Curriculum issues – males more likely to take technology-related courses
- Males are more likely to have positions at which there are ICTs available
- Policy-makers tend to be male

Proposed projects/activities:

- Carry out national surveys and research on learners' needs, on gender-related challenges, and establish a regional database
- Increase access to relevant information – use networking when possible
- Organise workshops on ICTs for educators, teacher educators, and policy-makers
- Establish media centres to increase access for those living in rural areas
- Support development of regional ICT policy

Barriers to ICTs Encountered by Women – African Region

for the Purpose of Open and Distance Learning

Countries Represented

- Botswana
- Ghana
- Kenya
- Lesotho
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Senegal
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Uganda
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

Barriers Identified:

- Education and Training
- Technical Infrastructure
- Educational Infrastructure
- High Costs
- Socio-cultural Issues
- Paternalistic Attitudes
- Health and Resources
- Governance Issues
- Rural/Urban Split

Categorising the Barriers

- Socio-cultural Barriers
- Political Barriers
- Economic Barriers
- Education and Training Barriers

"Actionable" Barriers

- Lack of access
- ICT illiteracy
- Lack of ICT trainers, especially women
- Lack of coordination among O/DL providers
- Absence of appropriate curriculum materials

Possible Actions:

- Conduct a needs assessment – select sites for pilot telelearning centres
- Establish national training teams with responsibility to train trainers
- Develop national policy guidelines for access and use of ICTs
- Raise awareness about the potential use of ICTs

Recommendations:

- Report from the symposium be widely circulated – government officials should be briefed
- Establish a *listserv* for the participants to facilitate on-going communication
- Case studies to be carried out and reports made available
- Establish a pan-African association to coordinate related activities

Next Steps:

- COL will publish proceedings and papers
- Participants will brief ministry officials about the symposium and its outcomes
- Participants will provide COL with information about ODL institutions and associations, national telecommunications, media and Internet service providers
- COL will establish a *listserv* to facilitate communications between/among participants
- Participants will undertake case studies

Barriers to ICTs Encountered by Women – South Pacific Region

for the Purpose of Open and Distance Learning

Countries represented:

- Kiribati
- Nauru
- Samoa
- Solomon Islands
- Tonga
- Tuvalu
- Vanuatu
- and the University of the South Pacific

Barriers identified:

- Lack of:
  - data/information
  - or poor infrastructure
  - training and education opportunities, particularly in the area of ICTs
  - resources – financial and human
- Attitudes and perceptions
- Brain drain

Draft Project Outlines

- Establish a regional database on ODL and ICT use with an emphasis on women and girls
- Develop/deliver training programmes in ICTs
  - for technicians
  - for teachers and other users
- Establish telelearning centres

Recommendations – Policy Issues:

Support policies to:
- increase use of ICTs
- provide equal consideration to all educational methodologies
- decrease taxes/other costs
- increase women's participation in decision-making roles

Recommendations – Education/Training Issues:

Provide support to:
- increase quality in education and training
- raise awareness about ICTs
- increase opportunities for ICT training
- increase participation by women – scholarships, deferential fee structures
- examine alternative, non-conventional delivery methods

Recommendations – Infrastructure/Communcations:

- Establish regional database
- Improve infrastructure
- Establish pilot telelearning centres
- Support telecommunications links
  - USPNet
  - create a *listserv*

Summary – Regional Meetings:

Commonalities in barriers include:
- Cross-cutting all – lack of financial resources
- Socio-cultural biases – affect education/ training opportunities
- Lack of trained female teachers/trainers
- Poor infrastructure – electricity, communications, and so on
- Low literacy levels
- Rural/urban issues

Common Initiatives

- Data collection on women, ICTs and the use of ODL – to better inform decision- and policy-makers
- Workshops – for women trainers and others – on all aspects of ICTs
- Pilot test sites on the use of appropriate technology for delivery of education/ training – radio, telecentres, etc.

Next Steps

- Synthesis and update report – by Green and Trevour-Deutsch
- Meeting to discuss/amend synthesis report – prepare the "way forward", add case studies
- International conference on Gender Issues and the Use of ICTs – for advocacy, project initiation, awareness-building, policy development, and so on

What else can be done?

- Raise awareness about the issues
- Work with governments/providers for policy changes and implementation
- Provide education and training
- Target specific groups for assistance
- Support pilots to demonstrate advantages and usefulness of ICTs
- Establish networks, *listservs* – to remain in communication, provide support

**Women and ICTs
for Open and Distance Learning**

Lessons Learned
from Commonwealth Countries
in the Developing World

The Process

- Research Reports - Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific
- Regional Expert group meetings - Tanzania, India, Barbados, and New Zealand

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The Report

- **Synthesis** - information from the research process (1998 to 2001)
  Lessons learned and regional differences

- **Case Studies** - recent examples of women's use of ICTs
  ODL and broader applications

The Goal

To provide guidance to those working in the field, to ensure that women have equal access to education and training through distance learning modes.

Use of ICTs in Open & Distance Learning

- print - most common medium
- supplements - radio,TV broadcasting, audio,videocassettes
- telephone and fax - often for tutor support (some 2-way radio)
- some limited use of e-mail
- face-to-face sessions at study centres
- a few examples of new ICTs – audioconferencing, videoconferencing, computer-based communication (e-mail, Web access and online learning)
- newer ICTs feature in some future plans

Access to Open & Distance Learning

- limited data for women DL registration and completion
- women not equitably represented in ODL courses in all countries
- significant variation between and within regions

Barriers to the Education of Women

- Illiteracy
- Poverty
- Time Famine
- Socio-Cultural Factors

Illiteracy

"Without basic literacy, there is no access to more and higher education, much less to ICTs. The challenge of illiteracy must be overcome before women can benefit from ICTs."

Report from Malaysia

Poverty

"Women are generally not engaged in their own economic activities and very few women have money. In many cases, they are barred from making money by their husbands. Since they need consent from husbands to obtain loans, some women may have no access to lending institutions."

Report from Zambia

Time Famine

"In some ways the Internet is a tool for those with lives of leisure."

A Caribbean respondent

Socio-Cultural Factors

"The socio-cultural and economic constraints that prevent women's access to educational programs are tribal and feudal set-up, male-dominated decision-making, lack of parental support for daughter's education, female segregation and seclusion."

Report from Pakistan

Socio-Cultural Factors

The lack of women teachers/trainers

Additional Barriers with ICTs

- Access

- Relevancy

Relevancy

"Apart from the telephone, women do not as yet require the use of other ICTs."

Report from Kenya

Access

- Access – Technology
- Access – Costs
- Access - Skills
- Access - Information
- Access - Socio-Cultural

Access – Technology

- Telecommunications Infrastructure
- Access to Telephone Service
- Electricity access
- Internet Access
- Equipment Access
- Access to Technical Support

Access – Costs

- telephone charges
- Internet access charges (ISP)
- course fees

Access – Skills

- computer skills
- English-language skills

Access – Information

- courses offered using ICTs
- equipment available
- training available

Access - Socio-Cultural

"… ICTs are male-dominated and women are not the first to gain access and use ICTs because of cultural and socio-economic factors."

Report from Sri Lanka

"Men own all the technology."

Reports from Zambia and Kenya

Access - Socio-Cultural

- lack of confidence
- absence of women as teachers and trainers in technical fields and in ICTs

Relevancy

- lack of relevancy to the lives of women
- need for local and meaningful content
- lack of local language content

Barriers to ICTs for the Provider

- lack of institutional preparedness
- high costs
- lack of teacher readiness

Strategies

- Improve Access
- Ensure Relevancy

Improve Access

- provide appropriate technology
- provide equipment
- reduce costs
- increase skills
- provide information and support
- address socio-cultural barriers

Provide Appropriate Technology

- ODL should be learner-centered
- low-cost, simple technologies
- literacy barriers sometimes rule out the written word
- no one wants to be cut-off from the potential benefits of the digital revolution in the long term

Provide Equipment

- telecentres to provide access to ICTs
- use local institutions
- introduce in women's fields

Reduce Costs

- provide technology at low costs
- tax exemptions
- subsidize equipment purchase

Increase Skills

- train through telecentres
- train through local institutions
- train educators
- train girls
- provide gender-appropriate training

Provide Information and Support

- campaigns to inform women about ICTs and ODL
- consciousness-raising activities
- combine with ongoing support
- address socio-cultural barriers
- affirmative action initiatives

Ensure Relevancy

- work through women's organizations
- work with women leaders
- make content that matters

Policy Development

- National policy – e.g., respond to ITU resolutions on Gender and Development
- ODL providers - policy positions on ICTs and gender
- Educational policy and theory

Research

- lack of gender-specific research on women distance learners
- need for national surveys
- regional database about ODL and ICTs

Portal for Information on Women and ICTs

**network of networks
dealing with women and ICTs**

Appendix E

Checklist for Addressing Gender-related Barriers to ICTs

Use this checklist when designing and implementing projects using ICTs to ensure that your project is accessible to both women and men. By putting strategies in place to address the following barriers you will increase your chances of fully benefiting from the talents and resources of both women and men. Since not all projects operate in the same environment, you should modify the checklist to reflect local circumstances.

Ensure Content Relevancy

- ❑ Value women's knowledge, wisdom and experience
- ❑ Use participatory methods to design and develop the content and learning systems to reflect the lives of women
- ❑ Build on traditional communications methods
- ❑ Ensure that the content is directly relevant to women's livelihood
- ❑ Consider local language content
- ❑ Overcome literacy barriers through the appropriate design and use of ICTs
- ❑ Use gender-appropriate instructional design
- ❑ Use gender-appropriate learning strategies

Address Barriers to the Availability of ICTs

- ❑ Ensure adequate communications infrastructure
- ❑ Ensure adequate institutional structures
- ❑ Consider using existing structures
- ❑ Ensure access to the use of reliable electricity
- ❑ Ensure adequate access to and control of user equipment (e.g., telephone, radio, etc.)
- ❑ Ensure access to the Internet
- ❑ Ensure access to technical support
- ❑ Address potential mismatch between technology provider and end-user

Address Barriers to the Usage of ICTs

Address High Costs
- ❑ electricity/battery charges
- ❑ telephone charges
- ❑ Internet access charges
- ❑ high cost of obsolescence
- ❑ training costs
- ❑ capital costs
- ❑ course fees
- ❑ additional educational costs (e.g., books, uniforms, etc.)

Address Skill Needs
❑ ICT awareness and knowledge
❑ Technology usage skills
❑ English language skills
❑ New learning skills (e.g., self-directed learning, etc.)

Address Lack of Information
❑ lack of awareness of ICTs' potential
❑ lack of knowledge about where to access equipment, training, and courses
❑ lack of advocacy

Address Socio-cultural barriers
❑ gender stereotyping
❑ lack of mobility
❑ restrictions on accessing public places
❑ need for proximity of ICTs
❑ need for security
❑ time famine
❑ lack of confidence
❑ lack of privacy
❑ lack of role-models
❑ absence of women as teachers and trainers

Address Barriers to ICTs for Providers

❑ Ensure institutional preparedness
❑ Ensure use of appropriate technology
❑ Ensure knowledge about teaching/learning strategies
❑ Ensure teacher preparedness
❑ Address high cost of programme development
❑ Address high cost of programme delivery
❑ Address issue of sustainability

Commonwealth Sisters

Commonwealth Sisters

Of the four regions

Pacific, African, Indian, Caribbean

Gathered to address

The barriers of women

Barriers of access

To ICT*

Relating these to

Socio-cultural relevancy...

And how they could help

To eradicate poverty

Checklists were drawn up

Key issues tabulated

Appropriate strategies

On these we ruminated

Concepts were analyzed

Dissected and articulated

Seems everything had

To be gender-related

Some case studies

Presented solutions

Engaging the attention

Of distant institutions

On the international conference

There was much discussion

Planning will continue

At a website location

All in all, we left

Enriched by the meeting

Just saying many thanks

To those guiding it to completion.

Lorna Callender (Caribbean delegate) on behalf of the participants.

Thanks to **Susan Phillips, Lindsay Green, Carol Walker, IDRC** and all those who contributed to making this a very worthwhile meeting. *June 2002*

*Information Communication Technology

Photographs of Meeting Participants