“Make it happen” was the theme of the International Women’s Day in 2015. This slogan is very appropriate for this special issue of the Journal of the International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (JISfTeH) that, for the first time, brings women in eHealth to the mainstream discussion.

It is true that this is not a new subject. We have all witnessed campaigns, government promises, social movements, and initiatives aiming at raising awareness for gender inequalities and prospects for women in several areas, and most recently in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

The United Nations system has been advocating for women’s rights, women studies, and gender equality for a long time, as part of its policy across all continents. The 4th World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, held in Beijing in 1995, highlighted the importance of gender equality and empowerment of women through ICT. Nevertheless, 20 years on, we still know that ICT impacts men and women in different ways.

Following the Beijing Declaration, the World Health Organization (WHO) has strengthened its work towards gender equity and human rights and is steadily raising awareness of norms, values, and inequalities related to the role of gender in perpetuating disease, disability, and even death, and are encouraging changes in society to fight gender as a barrier to good health.

However, women continue to have fewer opportunities to receive basic education and therefore fewer opportunities to benefit from the information society. This reflects the statement from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) showing that the number of girls choosing careers in technology-related fields is declining worldwide.

The ability of women to take advantage of ICT greatly depends on prevailing policies and an enabling environment to extend the ICT infrastructure to where they live. Inequality impacts women in both developed and developing countries, but disadvantaged communities suffer more from these disparities. In most cases, women are excluded from social and economic opportunities created by ICT, depriving them of the potential active role in their lives and their families alike.

There are many examples where women have benefited from ICT in education, health, commerce, etc., but the majority of these platforms are designed and implemented for women as recipients, without their full participation in the conceptualization, design and development of these solutions, which makes these programmes less appropriate to their needs. Also, women as innovators and creators of ICT-based solutions is still lagging, as they have not been given enough opportunity to access educational and training programmes, let alone job opportunities.

It is therefore an obligation to accelerate the efforts made by policy- and decision-makers, civil society, professional associations, scholars, NGOs, and development partners, including the private sector, to break down barriers in ICT and to include women and girls in the process.

It is also necessary to strengthen ongoing initiatives and support local solutions with local content in local languages. Most of all it is important to raise awareness in society to better understand the needs and trends in the sector.

Let us not forget to put into practice the commitments previously made at UN conferences and summits, particularly the World Conferences on Women over the last 20 years, as well as the seminar on Women in Engineering Leadership held in Kuala Lumpur in 2014.

We should all be prepared to relate the power of ICT to support sustainable development and contribute to closing both the digital divide and the gender gap.

However, the central point in this issue of the JISfTeH is to address how digital technologies can be appropriately used to create participatory governance.
models that enable socially and economically marginalised women in local contexts to gain centre stage in their own lives.

Therefore, this is not only a justification to raise awareness for this problem based on evidence presented in the articles in this issue of the Journal, but also it is time to move forward to take initiatives and create opportunities for women and girls. It means cultural shifts in education anytime, anywhere for everyone, and how to make it happen.

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