EDITORIAL

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND AND WE MEAN WOMEN TOO

In 2011, the International telecommunication Union (ITU) envisioned an initiative to encourage women and girls to consider a career in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT). Reflecting the fast-growing industry, and certain that there are job opportunities in the sector, this appeal for digital inclusion of women and girls was a recognition that ICT needs new talents and that the number of women in the sector is disproportionately low.

To strengthen this initiative, it created an International Girls in ICT Day to be celebrated on the 4th Thursday of every April, to remind us all, of this global opportunity for countries to promote events and raise awareness of the importance of ICT and digital inclusion for women and girls. So far, almost 70,000 girls and women from 138 countries have taken part in its celebrations, and in 2017, the International Girls in ICT Day will be celebrated on 27th April.

Now, the excitement is for the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Endorsed by all Member States in September 2015, the agenda comprises 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators. It is bolder, more ambitious, and more inclusive than the previous 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Agenda 2030 advocates to end poverty and hunger, advance access to clean water and sanitation, improve health and education, honour human rights, gender equality, empowerment of women, protection of the environment and all in between; framed in economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability pillars.

The universal call for the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) urges countries to be creative, and develop a new mind set to confront the challenges ahead. The 17 goals are interconnected and dependant on the success of one another, and it will be impossible to reduce poverty, decrease hunger, increase education, and improve health if there are no opportunities for innovation, more jobs and access to technology and most importantly, the inclusion of women in the process.

Furthermore, during that same UN General Assembly in September 2015, leaders of the world endorsed a connectivity declaration demanding Internet access for all, and agreed that connecting the world should be a priority and a pre-requisite for achieving the Global Goals pledging to work for universal Internet access to be a reality by 2020.

So how do we do that?
Currently there are more than 3.4 billion Internet users, 46% of the world population and according to the Internet Live Stats; by 2017, there will be more Internet traffic than all previous years combined, besides, WIFI and mobile devices will be responsible for almost 70% of all Internet traffic. Internet has already surpassed television and radio as a means of entertainment, getting the news, making appointments, connecting to friends. Also, the exponential use of Social Media all over the world is rapidly changing the way people talk to each other, and 65% of adults use social media networks to get or give information for issues related to their personal or work life. Women already represents about half of social media users and constitute roughly three fifths of the bloggers; making it possible to network, to share experiences, disseminate knowledge, build solidarity systems, and strengthen their voices.

Therefore, digital inclusion and digital literacy is a big part of the SDGs and means empowerment. If one can connect from rural or indigenous areas, if people with disability, women and girls, youth or adult can benefit from the use of ICT and the increasing volume of information made available daily, their lives will greatly improve. There are already several examples of the transformative power of digital inclusion coming from all parts of the world, even developing countries. Governments, NGOs, International AID Agencies and different stakeholders should do all they can to support digital literacy programmes for boys and girls, and encourage it to be part of the school syllabus and we, as civil society should push for it.

Of course, we can always say that if half of the world is connected, the other half is not, especially women and
girls. Nevertheless, if we continue to assist women to be empowered and concentrate on gender equality and encourage girls’ education and participation in the labour market, we will contribute to give them a better future and there will be real prospects for advancement.

Pushing for girls’ and women’s education is an important driving force against poverty and key to human development. The Beijing + 20 declaration highlights that when women and girls have equal access to education, they make more informed decisions within their home and their communities, make healthier choices for themselves and their families and have increased opportunities of employment.

In 2013, the ISfTeH has created a working group on Women (WoW) aiming to discuss gender inclusion in Telemedicine and eHealth. The group has grown into one of the most active working groups encouraging women’s empowerment and development to face the global challenges of today. It has been working closely with NGOs and International Organizations such as Millenia2015 (http://www.millennia2015.org) and UNESCO (http://en.unesco.org) believing that cooperative work can be a strong foundation for peace and development.

Now, with the eyes and minds of the world focusing on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, WoW’s commitment to promote gender equality will be renewed into the “future we want” for every men, women, boys and girls of the world.

So, let’s be part of it!

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