



Women's Rights are Connected Rights

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Many of the things that I would have liked to say have been mentioned by the previous speakers, and I will not repeat, but I also want to thank you very much, President Prodi and the Foundation for Worldwide Cooperation, for inviting us, as well as the President of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, for including us in this very important discussion.

We are a very interested stakeholder, because of those who are not connected, the majority of whom are women. Of the people who are connected, women are 30% less of those that are connected, so either way we have an interest in this subject. We also see that the world is changing and is changing very fast, but the institutions through which we work are not changing fast enough. In fact, the bad guys are adapting much faster than the good guys, so to say. So when Jeff makes the point about public service, it is about ensuring that public institutions, institutions such as this one, also get ahead of the curve, in order to serve the majority of the people who should be benefitting much better from the era of digitalisation. We have seen that in education, and health, and economic well-being, technology plays a significant role. This is what makes the Internet a public good that needs to be made accessible to all people without any barrier. The situation right now is that our public policy discourse does not make access to connectivity and the Internet, for the poor, it is also not a gender-equality equaliser, and in order to make it more accessible, ensuring that we deliver it to address all kinds of injustice through the Internet would mean that we could create a significantly transformed public service that wants to work in the 21st century, in the manner which delivers services.

In fact my own interest in the subject came as a result of being in a public service, where I felt that, as politicians, we had no clue about the importance of the digital revolution, and sometimes when public servants who were technocrats came to present projects to us we were either wowed because that looked so exciting but we didn't fully understand it, or we blocked it because we thought it was too much money and we were afraid if something went wrong. Either way it was a problem. I felt that there is a need for responsible policy making, for us as policy makers to know more about the subject. And I feel that while there are more policymakers, and we see them in different gatherings, who understand and are grappling with the issues, we have not reached the tipping point. So there is something that is to be done in investing in the buy-in of policy makers so that they can become allies of us, facilitating the changes that we are talking about.

For us, the fact that ¼ billion fewer women than men are connected makes this partnership important. The fact that 200 million fewer women than men own a mobile phone in low-income and middle-income countries, and the fact that in Sub Saharan Africa, women are almost as likely as men to be online creates an opportunity and an incentive for us to make this work. We have also seen statistics from Intel in 2012, which estimated that giving women access to the Internet could contribute between \$13 to 18 billion annual GDP across 134 developing countries. That's a lot of opportunity not to want to pursue, and the impact of that opportunity would mean less violence against women, because more women who are economically empowered will take themselves out of harms way. It means less infection of HIV/AIDS for young girls. It means more women would be able to avoid death while giving birth, because they would be able to choose and to have access to better health services, and these are all issues in the realm of rights that we might not always immediately connect with the access to the Internet, but access to the Internet facilitates the possibility for all of these needs of women and girls to be met.

Last year, in our Commission of the Status of Women, which meets every year – the biggest forum where women of the world, government and civil society come together – the theme was *Women and the place of work*. We evaluated the number of countries that had specific policies that were directed at facilitating the benefits of the digital development towards women and we were only able to identify about 20% of all member states who had direct interest in that. So again, that creates an unevenness that exacerbates inequality that is gender based. For that reason, therefore, we have an interest in ensuring that we address this.

The projections that 90% of the jobs by 2020 would require a form of relatively sophisticated digital literacy means that to prepare women adequately for the future, and even present, world of work we again need to ensure that we're able to invest in access to the Internet. If you look at young people in the countries that are

developing, Africa, Asia, again the education systems are not adequately preparing young people for the future that we are talking about, and the utilisation of the resources that are meant for development doesn't always identify Internet access and connectivity as a key input into fighting poverty, and we need to get a vocabulary in public policy discourse that says that Internet is important to end poverty. It's not a nice thing to have. I find that many times when I engage with my colleagues who are ministers, this is something that we can give to a community after we've given water, sanitation, etc., not as one of the core services we need to deliver in order to address poverty.

So my point is that women would be significantly served if we were able to position the whole discourse of Internet access at the same level as the need for basic services that address extreme poverty, that address the difficulties of access to health services and that address the need for quality education, for both girls and boys, in the most remote parts of the world, as well as investment in teacher training.

The UN has recently adopted a resolution that says that online freedom is a human right. This is the Human Rights Council Resolution /32/L.20, if I have to put it like that. So there is something we can build on and walk on, and as Jeffrey Sachs has said, the Sustainable Development Goals provide us with many entry points for us to use, but we should not only rely on the Sustainable Development Goals, we need broader society to buy-in in order for us to be able reach the broader society that will become strong advocates and support the initiative that we are about, young women I have to say, and I think many UN agencies, would have an interest in the success of this initiative.