- Session Title: Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Gender and Access

- Date: December 20

- Time: 10:10-11:40

- Session Organizer: Mili Semlani

- Chair/Moderator: Jac SM Kee

- Rapporteur/Notetaker: Mili Semlani

- List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:
Anri van der Spuy (RIA/ISOC, South Africa), Bruna Santos (Youth Observatory, Brazil), Chenai
Chair (Research ICT Africa, South Africa), Katie Drew (UNHCR), Doreen Bogan-Martin
(ITU/EQUALS), Serene Lim (Empower Malaysia), Carla Licciardello (ITU), Carlos Rey-Moreno
(APC), Dr Sarbani Banerjee Belu (IIT Bombay)

- Key Issues raised (1 sentence per issue):
The key issues of the session were discussed with respect to each of the women sub groups that form a
basis for the study too.
Summarising the issues via quotes:
    1.   Refugee women
"Access to information, the sharing of knowledge is the sine qua non of empowerment and
empowerment in one's own life. While keeping in mind a critical sense essential to avoid falling into
the illusion of 'miracle solutions', we believe that the Internet and social networks represent in this
respect an opportunity to exploit."
- Anonymous respondent
2. Indigenous women
"[Access to the internet is important for women] to gain access to the outside world. Their windows
to the outside world is largely through RTM (government run terrestrial television) – access to the
internet opens them up to alternative information, on health, on education."
- Respondent working with high risk and HIV positive rural and indigenous women in East Malaysia

3. Young women
"A women created a fake online profile because she feared the outcome if the community found out
what her true opinions were around certain laws and practices."
- Anonymous respondent

4. LGBTQI Women
"Queer women in Nigeria are mostly able to meet other queer women on online forums."
- Respondent from Nigeria

"There is no information by mainstream channels about sexual diversity and human rights, so the
internet has been the most popular, direct, and with great sources to access the information."

- If there were presentations during the session, please provide a 1-paragraph summary for each presentation:
Moderator Jac Sm Kee used a short presentation to give a brief about the BPF work so far including the past years. In 2016, it looked at the barriers that women face in not only accessing but also using the Internet, along with mapping initiatives and methods that have been used in diverse jurisdictions to overcome these barriers (see the report here). In 2015, it investigated online abuse and gender-based violence (see the outcome report here), which has been shown to form a significant barrier for women wanting to access and use the Internet in certain regions. She also introduced the process and methodology used in 2017 and the summarised the survey findings for each sub group –women with disabilities, refugee women, young women, elderly women, LGBTQI women, women in rural areas, and indigenous women.

- Please describe the Discussions that took place during the workshop session (3 paragraphs):
Over the past three years, the IGF's Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Gender has been investigating various challenges pertinent to women's ability to access and use the Internet.

The BPF's work has indicated that much of the initiatives and literature available on women's ability to access and use the Internet tend to approach women as a homogenous group and fails to truly account for the unique way in which contexts and circumstances might impact women's ability to access and use the Internet. As a result, the BPF community in 2017 decided to look at the specific barriers faced by specific communities of women - including women with disabilities, refugee women, young women, elderly women, LGBTQI women, women in rural areas, and indigenous women.

The survey inputs received from women working, representing or advocating for the various sub-groups brought out the specific needs and challenges in social and economic development facilitated by Internet access. It also detailed various initiatives at regional and national levels that are addressing some of these challenges. Connecting with the community, accessing information, and promoting educational opportunities were some of the key needs for the various sub-groups. The survey highlighted lack of infrastructure, insufficient local and relevant content, and social and cultural norms as major hindrances to Internet access for refugee women, indigenous women, queer women and young women. It also stressed the need for gender-focused policies and the sustainable grassroot-level initiatives to enhance inclusivity.

The BPF and its panel at this working session discussed the BPF's preliminary findings and recommendations for further exploration, and the ways in which stakeholders can support the work in addressing barriers to meaningful access faced by specific communities of women.

Each of the panelists then shared their experience while working or belonging to their respective women sub groups. They highlighted various ICT challenges and the specific issues pertaining to the sub group they represented. Katie Drew of UNHCR spoke of her interactions with refugee women in Uganda who had to trade ration supplies for access to internet or even phone chargers.

- Please describe any Participant suggestions regarding the way forward/ potential next steps /key takeaways (3 paragraphs):
Several participants from the session eagerly shared their experiences and related work they were involved with. A participant from Kosovo highlighted lack of local content as a key access issues for

women from Africa. She also mentioned that low online security compelled them to use fake profiles online.

Another participant from Mexico stressed on the importance of ICT education for women, special interest groups and more IG training and opportunities for women to digitally empower them was the need of the hour. In terms of privilege & meaningful access to technology, the context in which women exist determines the effect technology will have in their lives.

Responses from some of the participants with STEM careers also showed that women in IT or tech still had to deal with male dominance at work, gender inequality and thus a need for a universal mentality shift was called for. "Gender bias in design of tech and in collection of data affects & exacerbates similar bias. Need to work in multistakeholder & multidisciplinary way & policies in place" said one of the participants.

Issues of gender violence online and offline was also seen as a major detriment in increasings women's access to internet.

Gender Reporting

- Estimate the overall number of the participants present at the session: 33

- Estimate the overall number of women present at the session: 28

- To what extent did the session discuss gender equality and/or women's empowerment?
It was fully based on gender and access.

- If the session addressed issues related to gender equality and/or women's empowerment, please provide a brief summary of the discussion:
This session was based on the BPF work on Gender and Access thus all the discussions and inputs adhered to the work of the volunteer group and their findings in addition to seeking more input from the community for the same.