

**WELCOMING REMARKS FROM
THE COORDINATOR, WSIS AFRICA GENDER
CAUCUS-EAST AFRICA REGION
ARUSHA, TANZANIA - 20TH TO 22ND OCTOBER
2004**

Karibuni Mabibi and Mabwana kwa inchi hetu hii njema ya Tanzania. We welcome you all Ladies and Gentlemen to our wonderful country Tanzania.

**Hon. Dr Maua Daftari, Deputy Minister, Ministry of
Communication and Transport**

Hon. Shamim Khan, Deputy Minister, Ministry of
Community Development, Gender and Children

**Member of the Steering Committee, WSIS Gender
Caucus, Professor Eva Rathgeber**

UNIFEM representative

All distinguished guests

The Media

Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the sub region WSIS Gender Caucus, I thank you all for having shown interest in this conference. Join me to applaud the Government of Tanzania, and in particular the Ministry of Transport and Communication, Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children, and AITEC, Tanzania, for responding to the request of the sub region Gender Caucus, to focus this regional follow up to the WSIS process (that took place in

Geneva last December), on Women and ICTs. This is a clear manifestation that these institutions are committed to seeing to it that the purported development of an information society is inclusive of women's positions on the right to communication.

This is a crucial moment where we shall all have to discuss this critical and challenging topic, transparently if our region is to make concrete inputs to the on going deliberations on communication for all, especially as we plan to position the sub regional gender issues to the second phase of the WSIS process, due next November 2005 in Tunis.

I am proud however, to say that the global women's movement have for decades straggled to make the world aware of the crucial role communication plays in creating harmony, and maintenance of our communities, **by identifying the missing link between the development of the ICT industry and Gender**. At the international level, in Beijing, women identified access to media and IT development as one of the 12 critical areas of concerns that states needed to address if there was to be equity in development. During the Bamako and the Geneva summit meetings women's contribution to the discussions and commitments to building a global information society was significant and can no longer be ignored. This is therefore, another milestone for us here to show case why it is critical to effectively plan for equity in the communication processes particularly here in Africa.

I am sure you will all believe Phillip Lee (a scholar), who argues “communication is a faculty of reason. Indeed it is reason that enables human being to justify their beliefs and actions; to make moral judgments; to make choice on many aspects of life; to contemplate past and future; to imagine; to be self –conscious the state of our mind, and that of others. Therefore, communication I would say is lifeblood of very human being.

We cannot also run away from the fact that women in Africa and I am sure elsewhere in this world are immensely contributing to the well being of their communities and the states in general. Here in Africa, over 50% of the cheap labour force that has continued to hold economies of our nations are women; 80% of nurturers of tomorrows brains to develop this continent are women; over half the population of voters on this continent are women; over 60% of health providers at community levels and particularly caring for the HIV/aids are women; during armed conflicts, women have been proved to be good mobilizes for resources, and are good counselors. We see many survivors of war picking up their pieces and moving on because of the inner strength and the will of women to see to it that their communities do not vanish. Women are contributing to all sectors of development including the IT industry.

However, we are all aware that today, the right to communicate, especially among these many marginalized, isolate and rural poor women do not fully enjoy this basic fundamental right. **It is also true that different class of**

people, gender, cultures and religions, despite the clarity of article 19 of the UDHR, and all sections regarding freedom of expression and access to information in some of our constitutions, have interpreted the definition of the right to communicate differently, and this has greatly affected vulnerable groups such as that of women. This has serious implications to the future social, political and economic development of our continent.

Is it only logical for this continent therefore, to make concrete and genuine plans that will enable this very vital constituency of its population to fully exercise this very fundamental human right for their livelihood? I personally believe that if one enjoyed the right to communicate, one is likely to enjoy all the other rights, because communication gives every individual the opportunity to use and expand ones thinking in making their lives better.

I therefore, pray that as we critically discuss Women and ICTs we do not forget to make systematic audit of how we have performed since the idea to develop an information society came into being. We must analyze our challenges and genuinely make our community part of the Global information Society.

I say this because, in theory, yes the world is seen to work towards improving global communication in order to create a global information society. It is important however, to note that in practice each block is busy addressing its critical needs of concerns in communication. Therefore,

Africa must not be wood wicketed in any processes or development of ICTs that will not be relevant and useful to the communication needs of its people, and particularly the needs of the majority who continue to be left out of this information society ring. Africa must be strategic in developing reliable, affordable and efficient communication systems for its entire people. This is when Africa will sieve to be known as a continent full of conflicts, poverty, ignorance and disease for the reasons I have highlighted above.

We must therefore, be critical when addressing the issues highlighted in the three days programme. We must ask critical questions, whose right to communicate are we planning for and for what gains? How will ICTs help Africans to position their views on the global concerns that affect them, such as WTO, terrorism, and how will Africa utilize the ICTs to reduce its problems.

Finally I wish to call upon you, as we prepare for an information society that enjoys equity and equality in communication, we must not forget the challenging tasks we have ahead of us to balance the whole issue of the right to communicate, and the global, national, and private politics and the economics of communication.

On behalf of the WSIS Gender Caucus of the Sub region, I will end by expressing my sincere thanks to all those who have financially and materially contributed to the planning of this conference. Particularly, I wish o thank the

following for financial assistance that made it possible for all us to be here today.

All private institutions and NGOs that have supported individuals to come here

Canadian e - Policy Resource Centre (CePRC)

Ford Foundation – East Africa

IDRC East and Southern Regional Office

UNIFEM- The Eastern Africa Regional

Finally join me to salute Harry Hare (AITEC), thank you for working so hard to bring us to this outstanding corner of Tanzania.

Thank you for Listening to me.

I now take this opportunity to call upon Professor Eva Rathgeber to give her keynote speech.