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HAUT-COMMISSARIAT

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HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
PALAIS DES NATIONS • 1211 GENEVA 10, SWITZERLAND
www.ohchr.org • TEL: +41 22 917 9000 • FAX: +41 22 917 9008 • E-MAIL: registry@ohchr.org

1 February 2017

Call for inputs from industry and the tech community, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to a report on "ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective"

Deadline 15 February 2017

Background

On 1 July 2016, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 32/13 on "The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet".

Paragraph 13 of the resolution requests "the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective, in consultation with States, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, international organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society, industry, technical community and academia and other stakeholders, and to submit it to the Council at its thirty-fifth session" in June 2017.

For the preparation of this report, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) invites inputs from industry and the technical community, as well as from any other organizations engaged in activities related to the gender digital divide. For this purpose we have prepared a questionnaire (please see attached) and would appreciate your responses. Please feel free to address any other issues that may be considered useful for this report. We would also welcome receiving copies of recent reports or publications by your organization on this subject.

Submissions and responses to the questionnaire should be a **maximum of 5 pages** in length, and will be made available for consultation on the OHCHR website.

Please send submissions and responses by **15 February 2017** to registry@ohchr.org with the subject title: "Input to Report on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective."
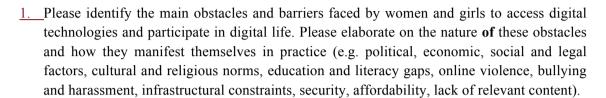
For further information, please see
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/WaystoBridgetheGenderDigital.aspx

Questionnaire

For the preparation of this report, OHCHR would appreciate receiving information in response to the following questions:

The meaning of the digital divide/extent of the problem

1. Please identify the main obstacles and barriers faced by women and girls to access digital technologies and participate in digital life. Please elaborate on the nature **of** these obstacles and how they manifest themselves in practice (e.g. political, economic, social and legal factors, cultural and religious norms, education and literacy gaps, online violence, bullying and harassment, infrastructural constraints, security, affordability, lack of relevant content).

    Some of the main obstacles that we have seen our users face participating in digital life is the lack of accessibility to the internet due to high prices, lack of means i.e. not having access to a computer and or smart phone to access this on and education which would allow them to move freely and effectively through the digital space.

2. Does your company/organization consider the impact of its digital products, services, strategies and policies on women and girls?

    As an online platform, our main mode of interaction with our users is through our mobi site as well as our social media pages. Because of this we carefully curate and create products with young women and girls in mind. This means we opt for are low data usage sites, accessible content that can be read by everyone no matter their education and useful content. We are very aware of the impact the information we provide may have on the choices our users may make and so therefore keep it factual, simple, free of religious and political biases and encourage our users to engage in conversations about topics raised. Our aim is to provide a safe space for young women to voice the issues they face and gain access to information so they can make informed choices.

3. Please indicate if your company/organization collects sex and gender disaggregated data regarding access, use and impact of digital technologies. Is this data openly published and accessible (in accordance with responsible data practices)? If possible, please provide such statistics.

    We are currently running a survey based on the sexual and reproductive health of young Women in South Africa. It is an extensive survey and the information will be published on our site and in medical papers once we have collected 1000 completed surveys.

4. Please indicate if your company/organization has set measurable targets for gender equality in access and use of digital technologies and describe those targets and their effect.

    Possibly the most obvious way of setting measurable targets is by creating a space exclusively for girls. This means that, whilst it may be easier to make a "Lets talk" site and draw in more users, we aimed instead to create "Girlztalk", a space for girls to talk and express their concerns. This means that we set a target to create content that not only speaks to young

women but is also relatable to them. We have a goal of 500k users on our site a month, as well as 500k users on our social media sites.

5. How does your company/organization address the needs of diverse members of the female population in terms of accessing and participating in digital technologies, including women and girls belonging to ethnic or linguistic minorities, those living in extreme poverty or of low caste, those living in rural or marginalized urban areas, women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, transgender and intersex persons, elderly women etc.? What can companies/organizations do to ensure access to alternative communications mechanisms for those unable or unwilling to participate in digital technologies?

Whilst our site tries to cater to all young African women, due to the various languages used by our users, we are unable at present to reach all of them and thus only use English as a medium of communication. We do however try to bridge the language gap through our style of writing by using simple language and terms that our users are able to relate to. We believe that through education on digital platforms, we and other organization's like us, would be able to reach minorities. Also through talking about issues affecting minorities, like we currently do through our posts, we would be better equipped to talk to minority groups and include girls from different groups.

Human Rights implications of the gender digital divide for women and girls

6. What is your company/organization doing to ensure that its interventions to bridge the gender digital divide, are based upon, and fully consistent with international human rights, including gender equality? Does it conduct impact assessments and/or consult with civil society, affected communities, and human rights experts? (You may wish to consider some key principles required to adopt a human rights-based approach *viz*.: accountability, equality and non-discrimination, participation, transparency, empowerment, sustainability, etc.).[1]

We ensure our interventions are successful by employing young women from different backgrounds, including young women who come from poverty, are part of the LGBTI community and as of today our community manager is living with HIV. Through constant engagement with our writers and community manager we are able to get an up to date insight on their needs, concerns and thoughts as we continue to create content. We also conduct daily discussion on our social media platforms where we engage with our readers about issues affecting them.

7. How does your company/organization encourage the development and use of digital technologies as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls? How does it support the creation of online content, applications and services that reflect women's needs and/or promote their rights? Does it support women's rights organizations, women human rights defenders and women environmental activists to use these technologies (for example to access critical information, build knowledge, express thoughts and beliefs, form networks and communities and mobilise for change)? Please provide any relevant examples.

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[1] Other human rights considerations that could/should be taken into consideration include freedoms of expression, association, religion or belief, freedom from violence, right to education, life, health, identity, an adequate standard of living, to participate in government and in cultural life, promotion of gender equality and rights of non-discrimination, rights of indigenous peoples, minority rights, rights of migrant workers, right to enjoy the benefits of scientific advancement, etc.

Through informative articles that are not run of the mill, but rather that aim to engage and challenge our readers we are constantly striving our readers to think outside of the box, irrespective of their backgrounds and education. This is carried through to our social media discussions where our community manager not only responds to users but also pushes them to think outside the box. We also do support activists in various spaces and encourage them to write for us and share their perspectives. Currently our community manager who is an HIV activists is also one of our writers and a master in public health is joining our team to share expert advice on public health issues.

8. Does your company/organization take into account the gender and ICT targets contained in the UN Sustainable Development Goals?[2] Please elaborate.

Yes, we do take into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals Currently with regard to gender and ICT targets. We recognise that information is power and the more informed our users are about the issues facing their communities on a local and international level the more engaged they become to participate in resolving issues. On our mobi platform and other social media pages we cover issues raised in the SDG's on a daily basis, whether from an environmental, health, gender, economic or social perspective. Users are encouraged to engage in conversations about these topics which in turn guides us on their needs and areas where they may not have had access to information.

9. Are you aware of any laws, policies or practices to address technology-related or technology-mediated violence against women and girls (e.g. cyber bullying, hate speech, stalking, sexual harassment, trafficking, manipulation of personal information and images)? Has your company/organization taken any specific actions to protect against, and respond to violence experienced by women and girls via technology platforms (e.g. policies, monitoring of content, providing mechanisms for reporting and redress)?

Yes, we are. Cyber bullying, hate speech, sexual harassment, images and stalking being the main ones. We try and address these by monitoring closely our mobi site as well as our online platforms. We offer guidance on safe practices and risks involved with social media and the internet. Any users who do not abide by good technology practices are banned from our spaces.

10. Does your company/organization facilitate access to remedy in accordance with human rights principles and standards, where human rights harms may be caused or contributed to by connectivity initiatives (e.g. where an individual is threatened by internet-based content, or by illegitimate surveillance, limitations on freedoms of expressions, and other rights)?[3]
Currently no.

11. Has your company/organization considered how Big Data, the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Ambient Intelligence may impact on the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective? Do you see a risk that women and girls may be discriminated against, or excluded by these technologies? Or are they likely to create new opportunities to promote

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[2] For example, Goal 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; Goal 9.c Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.
[3] See UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Principles 29 - 31.

gender equality and empowerment? How can companies/organizations influence design and standards to ensure these technologies are inclusive?

We believe by taking part in these new technologies we can make them work for us instead of against us. At present, we have no link to companies working on these designs but would be interested in partaking in the global discussion on these things in order to voice our opinions and to ensure that they create new opportunities for gender equality and empowerment.

Possible solutions for bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective

12. Is your company/organization taking measures to expand equal access and enhance the participation of women and girls in digital technologies as users, content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders? Please elaborate on any initiatives, programs or other interventions you may be leading or supporting (including to address underlying causes of the gender digital divide).

As previously mentioned, our site and social media pages are exclusively for girls thus ensuring enhanced participation by women in the digital space. On our mobi.site we have a space called GirlZof Africa which is where we share stories of girls from across Africa. All of the content on girlztalk.mobi is written by female students who form part of the SEED Community loan programme (www.seedcom.org) GirlZtalk is a social business established by SEED Community to provide young women a safe space to share their voice and gain access to unbiased information on issues that impact their lives. Aside from working in the virtual space we have also established GirlZtalk groups, which are free and any girl can join. GirlZtalk Groups are led by high school girls or young women from a community. They share our vision to give every girl the opportunity to share her voice and get support.

The aim of the Girlztalk groups is to bring girls together to have fun, and to share ideas and thoughts on issues that girls are facing. Each week, the group receives a topic, with creative ideas on how the topic can be explored. Group members have discussions, play games, sing, dance… basically anything to assist them to share and express themselves. Content is curated by one of the students on the SEED Community loan programme. We connect to our groups through our mobi.site. All of our students have been trained as mentors and offer their services in our Outreach Programme, working with girls and young women who have been sexually abused. Whilst the above is not directly related to our digital space the reporting from our GirlZtalk Groups and our one to one conversations with young girls and women provides us with information as to the needs of young women growing up in South Africa today enabling us to address these issues in the digital space.

We are currently working with youth and parents in the West Rand of Johannesburg providing workshops on communication. These mixed gender workshops have been developed to address the communication divide between genders and ages. We believe that the way we are communicated to and communicate to others has a direct impact on our world view and how we see ourselves. We address the issues faced by communicating on social media in our workshops.

We have also produced and directed an award-winning documentary film, called GirlZtalk, which explores what it means to be a girl growing up in South Africa today. This has been shown in communities throughout Southern Africa and we continue to show it as a means to engage young women in conversations about the issues they may be facing.

13. Does your company/organization engage in public advocacy or participate in the Internet Governance Forum to promote gender-responsive policies on digital technologies? Do you support processes and mechanisms that enable the full, active and equal participation of women and girls in decision-making about how the Internet is shaped and governed?
No. Until now, we were unaware of these forums available to us. In future however we would like to participate as this is one of our areas of interest.

14. How can the industry and tech community be productively engaged in bridging the gender digital divide and improving the lived experience of women and girls online? What should be the responsibilities of different stakeholders to make digital inclusion a reality and ensure meaningful digital opportunities for all?
As previously mentioned, we believe that education of young women and girls on the digital space as well as their rights when using it is of vital importance. We need to create a generation of women who are interested and confident enough to engage in the digital space. For organizations such as ours we believe it is important to keep engaging women on digital platforms to help make them comfortable with the medium. Government's should then ensure the correct education of young women and girls across various groups and social classes on the use of digital technologies and the rights and regulations around them.