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Statement submitted by CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago, CHIRAPAQ – Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú, Fundacion para Estudio Investigacion de la Mujer, Grassroots Organisations Operating Together in Sisterhood, Huairou Commission: Women, Homes and Community, and The Network of Rural Women Producers, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer on behalf of the Committee of NGOs on the Condition of Women from Latin America and the Caribbean with the support of CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago, Huairou Commission: Women, Homes and Community, Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú (CHIRAPAQ), Network of Rural Women Producers and Grassroots Organisations Operating Together in Sisterhood celebrates the priority theme of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women due to the need to increase and ensure equal rights and possibilities to all women and girls in all their diversity to know and be able to use new communication technologies (TICs) and the need to decrease the gap existing with men and boys. The pandemic of COVID 19 demonstrates the negative impact it has on women and girls, the lack of devices, access to connectivity and knowledge and abilities to manage communications through new technologies, Women and girls were outside the possibilities to continue studying, working, and having family and social contacts due to these gaps. New communication technologies in Latin America and the Caribbean are an important and indispensable tool for economic and social development according to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the benefits of the new technologies represent a way to accelerate gender equality according to Sustainable Development Goals 5 women's empowerment, it is important to note that digitalization can worsen pre-existing gender inequalities.

While technologies are transforming the education system and the labor market, the study of digital capabilities and accessibility to connectivity from a gender perspective highlights technological gender gaps Women do not benefit equally from new technologies which leads to a lack of empowerment, especially in the labour market

The gap in access, a gender inequality of access to technology, is the first barrier that women face. The Inter-American Development Bank in a study called “¿Desigualdades en el mundo digital? brechas de género en el uso de las TIC” indicates that even when the gap of access has narrowed in Latin America and the Caribbean, the current percentage of Internet access in the region is 63% for men and 57% for women, while access to use of cell phones was 83% for men and 80% for women.

This inequality of access is also due to socio-economic factors. According to a study by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Digitizing Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: Urgent Action for a Transformative and Egalitarian Recovery,” only 23% of the rural population can benefit from accessing infrastructure and devices. Poor households also have financial difficulties in accessing the Internet, affecting mostly women due to their lower salaries. According to the study, in a sample of six countries in the region (Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru), the cost of these technologies is the most important obstacle to access for 52% of women.

Moreover, even if women had access to technological devices, the gaps in use and skills would prevent them from fully benefiting from the technology. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) expressed that in Latin America and the Caribbean, 40% of women manifested that their limited use of the internet is related to the lack of knowledge of use compared to 33% of men. For cell phones, this reason concerns 35% of women and only 24% of men.

The consequences of the access and use divide are that women are less integrated in the technological transformation. Regarding female entrepreneurship in the digital ecosystem, 59.4% of women interviewed in a study by the Inter-American

Development Bank emphasise an inability to enter the sector due to a lack of digital skills, which worsens their pre-existing working situation.

This growing exclusion from the digital sectors negatively affects their autonomy. The difficulty to develop technological skills reduces their employability and increases their job insecurity. Regarding the entrepreneurial digital transformation, the share of women working in this environment is limited to 32% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The generalization of telework during the pandemic has also amplified the gender digital gap. For example, the heavier burden of unpaid care work fell on women, preventing them from using their time to develop new digital skills.

This gap of technological knowledge is effectively observed through the place of women in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, in the region only 30% of individuals with Science, Technology, Engineering and Math degrees are women. Also, women graduates have to face difficulties while working in these male environments. They are victims of high social prejudices and stereotypes that create a hostile environment for them to work, where they suffer discrimination, higher demands and even harassment. For example, women are requested to show more abilities than the requested for men to get a promotion. Moreover, 56% of women in technology leave their jobs in mid-career because the heavy burden of household care tasks falls on women, leading them to give up their jobs to care for their children or other relatives.

The lack of digital skills and economic difficulties in accessing good connectivity result in low participation of women (less than 50%) in digital transformations.

Women have fewer digital skills because they have less opportunities to get training in digital technology. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), although women represent most of the university student population in Latin America and the Caribbean, they are a minority in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math studies. According to UN Women, for example, in Chile and El Salvador only 17% of graduates in these fields are women. The dominating assumption that digital and engineering studies are masculine is perpetrated by cultural patterns and gender stereotypes reproduced in schools, leading girls and women to develop little confidence in their abilities. According to a survey on the perception of abilities to use new technologies at work by Latinobarometro in 2020, women's self-perception of their ability to use the Internet is negative when men respond positively.

It is therefore necessary to adopt proactive policies and positive actions to increase the inclusion of women and girls in the process of digitalization of society to achieve their empowerment and gender equality.

Connectivity brings important benefits. For example, closing the gender gap in the world of work could represent a 35% increase in Gross Domestic Product according to the International Monetary Fund. Also, the innovation process will be positively influenced by greater gender diversity. Promoting women's participation in technology is an urgent task to reverse the widening gender gap. It is also an opportunity to increase the diversity of skills in activities that are central to economic development.

There is a need to strengthen public policies and private initiatives to break down these barriers. It is essential that educational programs incorporate the same incentives for girls and boys. Additional technology training can also improve the

transition from education to the workforce for women. Finally, promotion of awareness campaigns on gender equality in primary education is also crucial.

Public policies must develop awareness programs regarding the gender digital divide and fostering digital vocations among women. Also, it is important to generate spaces for women's empowerment. Finally, regional digital agendas must be strengthened for the objective of reducing digital gender gaps and strengthening the role of women in the process of technological transformations.

Regarding the private sector, it is necessary to define policies that incorporate care support to reconcile personal development at work and family responsibilities to decrease the actual burden of unpaid care on women. Developing equal responsibilities among men and women at household and in the society are also essential. Finally, implementing upskilling and reskilling programs to facilitate the updating and reconversion of women's digital skills can facilitate the integration of women in digital transformations.

It is consequently necessary to put these challenges on the public agenda while 11 countries in the region have already begun the process of evaluating the costs of the proposed digitization of women in Latin America and the Caribbean.
