



Misión Permanente de Costa Rica ante las Naciones Unidas

211 E. 43rd Street, Room 1002, New York, NY 10017. Tel: (212) 986-6373 Fax: (212) 986-6842

Preparations for CSW 62: Multi - stakeholder forum

Panel “Empowering rural women and girls through quality education and access to information and communication technologies (ICT)”

Embajador Juan Carlos Mendoza-García, Representante Permanente de Costa Rica ante las Naciones Unidas

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Mr. Chair,

Thank you for convening this important discussion on such a critical topic.

Education is one of the cornerstones of Costa Rica’s social policy. For many decades, my country has invested significant resources to increase access to education and we have a constitutional mandate to provide 8% of our GDP to this sector.

We can testify that education has a key role for the achievement of sustainable development. It provides the tools to fight poverty and inequality, as well as to reduce violence, tackle discrimination, etc. and it is a critical enabler for other fundamental rights.

We acknowledge the challenges that developing countries face to expand coverage and to improve quality. This is a long-term investment to build the capacity to provide equal access to this fundamental right. Costa Rica has one of the highest enrollment rates for primary education in our region. However, we still have a long way to go to tackle issues such



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as improving quality, reducing repetition and drop outs, in particularly when it comes to secondary education.

When it comes to girls, we need to pay particular attention to their specific needs, even more so when it comes to girls living in remote rural areas. They face some of the main challenges as other children from rural areas such as accessibility - some children have to walk hours to go to school-, but in addition they have other barriers. For instance, gender discrimination is one of the greatest impediments for their empowerment as many school-age girls have to stay home to take care of the household chores or take care of their siblings. And as we know, the recognition, redistribution and reduction of care work has been highlighter as one of the seven primary drivers of women's economic empowerment of the High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

Furthermore, child marriage and early childbearing as also factors that truncate the potential of rural girls and condemn them to a vicious cycle of poverty which is often transmitted from generation to generation.

It is why is critical to introduce a gender perspective in the design of education policies, development of curricula and even the design of school buildings.

Harnessing the power of information and communication technologies with education can be a strong driver for change for rural women and girls throughout their life cycle. ICTs are effective tools to reach those lagging further behind and have proven to be critical strategies to advance gender equality and empowerment. The important link between education and ICT was clearly reflected in the SDGs, which include a specify



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target on utilizing technologies and ICTs to realize these objectives.

ICTs are shaping our world at an overwhelmingly fast pace, and women and girls cannot be left behind. The new technologies are changing the structure of labor markets, providing new and different employment opportunities that require rural women and girls to acquire skills ranging from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills in science, technology and in ICTs. We need to reduce the digital divide, in particular for rural women and girls, whom tend to be among the most disadvantaged when it comes to the access to these technologies.

Even though Costa Rica has one of the highest rates of Internet penetration in Latin America, the poorer quintiles, and marginalized communities such as indigenous communities still have low rates of access. Therefore, in 2015 we launched a national program call “Connected Homes” that brings together government agencies, NGOs, and telecommunications companies to provide subsidized, affordable Internet service, computer resources, and software licenses to the unconnected households that are most in need, with an emphasis on indigenous and female-headed household.

State must allocate enough resources to support programs, projects and strategies that aim at increasing rural girls’ participation in the information society, including vocational, scientific and technical training, literacy training and capacity-building programs. We need to ensure a safe and more



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equitable access to ICTs and for that we need targeted efforts based on clear evidence and disaggregated data.

My last point is to highlight the need to address the multiple forms of discrimination faced by rural women and girls, because of their geographic location, but also when it comes to multiple other barriers. Girls with disabilities often struggle with accessibility and inclusivity issues, in particular in rural areas. Indigenous children in remote rural areas are far too often excluded from the same opportunities that other children enjoy. Therefore, it is of outmost importance that we keep in mind a perspective that is sensible to the needs of these groups.

Finally, I would like to highlight the importance of ICT in the socioeconomic development of rural areas that can provide information to new sustainable agricultural technologies that can contribute to their transition from subsistence farming to innovative, commercial production, helping them to increase their own food security and nutrition, generate marketable surpluses and add value to their production. The implementation of policies to reduce the gap of ICT between rural and urban through partnerships with the private sector, civil society, academia is an urgent need.