Gender aspects of digital divide

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Distinguished participants of the workshop! Dear guests and collegues!

Slide 1

Two days ago our country celebrated a remarkable event – 100th anniversary of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. 100 years ago our nation having established the first democratic secular state in the Muslim East, determined its destiny and development direction. As you know, one of first legislative acts adopted by that state was Women's suffrage. Today women in our counry enjoy equal rights with men, motherhood and children are under legislative protection. Women are represented at all branches of the government and operate as highly demanded specialists in different areas.

Slide 2

However, the time is changing and sets new requirements in front of us. Arising global problems affect life of every individual. The topic of our panel is dedicated to one of these problems.

Economic globalisation and information society taking shape in 20th century led to the rising importance of Information Tecnologies (shortly ICT). The term "Digital Divide" was put into use to express one of the key problems of the new age. "Digital Divide" refers to the gap between groups that have regular and efficient access to information and communications technologies, and those that don't or have restricted access.

Discussions over the rise of importance of information as a variety of social capital and its superiority over other types of capital started in scientifc circles of the world in mid 20th century. Currently, beside implicating a high value, the information also serves as a touchstone to differentiate social groups and layers globally and within each country.

Of course, the digital divide can take place both between countries and various groups within particular country. Number of leading international organisations , including United Nations, G8, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) take steps towards solution of this problem. All of above-mentioned organizations stress importance of complex approach and cooperation between countries and unions for resolution of this problem. This issue was discussed at the highest level during meetings of World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunisia in 2005 initiated by the United Nations.

The event held in Geneva was of an historical importance in terms of implementation of goal – Building open information society. As its outcome "Declaration of Principles" and the Action Plan for development of global information society were adopted. The general conception of the information society and main guidlines were reflected in the declaration of principles entitled "Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium".

- Capacity building
- Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
- Enabling environment for all groups
- ICT applications: creating benefits in all aspects of life
- Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
- The role of mass media
- Ethical dimensions of the Information Society, including ethnic, cultural aspects…

are the principles reflected in mentioned declaration.

In addition to above-mentioned principles, the general conviction at the summit was that provision of free and equal access to information, ideas and knowledge should be the key element of the Information Society.

Slide 3

I would like to note that I also participated in that historical summit as a member of Azerbaijani delegation. Let me also note that the speech of our president Ilham Aliyev and his thesis "Converting Black Gold into Human Gold" left an unforgettable impression on the participants. Namely this idea at the next stage served as a foundation of our countriy's policies towards information society. National ICT Strategy and number of state programs were adopted in our country. Application of ICTs in providing public service to citizens, wide use of ICTs in education system, provision of all regions of the country with internet connection are the results of activities intiated during those days.

During next 10 years, in the process of implementation of action plan determined in Geneva, including eliminating global and countrywide digital gap, number of challanges arose and new targets like "Digital Gender Equality" were formulated.

Slide 4

I think that to have clear picture of the problem of digital gender divide, we should consider it combined with such problems as "overall gender inequality" and "global digital divide". And thats why I would like to bring to your attention number of issues reflected in 2017 report of International Telecommunications Union.

In demonstrated slide digital differences between countries are reflected.

According to the report, in 104 countries more than 80 percent of 15-to-24-year-old young people have access to internet. However, if in the developed countries this rate is 94 percent, in developing countries it is 67 percent, and in the least developed countries – 30 percent. It must also be noted that in this age category internet access indirectly caracterizes access to education and scale of ICT penetration in education system.

In the developed countries proportion of housholds with internet access is twice as much comparing to other countries. In the least developed countries people mostly access to internet in workplaces, schools and universities.

Slide 5.

In the next slide gender proportions of digital differences between countries are shown. As we see developed countries mostly reached gender equality in terms of access to internet. In Australia and USA women even outnumber men in use of internet. Whereas, generally in internet users all over the world, men outnumber women for about 250 million or 12 percent. This rate changes depending on the country. In two thirds of the countries men has better access to the internet than women. We can assume that this indicator, directly or indirectly, hint to the differences in access to education.

Slide 6

Next three slides reflect informaion for 2017 year:

In this slide information on proportion of housholds with internet access by countries is shown. As we see, indicators of the CIS countries are lower than indicators of only Europe and higher than average indicator of the world.

Slide 7

In this slide we see Internet penetration rate for men and women in different countries. As we see, although the Europe has the highest penetration rate, however the gap between men and women internet users is lower in CIS countries. In Americas the women even have an advantage.

Slide 8

Next slide demonstrates how the internet user gender gap changed from 2013 to 2017. We see the significantly rising tendency of this gap in least developed countries, which negatively affects overall global indicators. Unfortunately, we see slight increase of internet user gender gap also in developing countries.

Slide 9

As I mentioned, currently the difference between male and female internet users globally is about 250 million and we still witness rising trend of this indicator.

Eliminating this gap is not only a moral issue that faces the world community. Solution of this problem can also make a significant contribution to the development of digital economy. Active involvement of women in ICT-related processes in developed countries like Finland and Denmark made a serious impact on social and economic development.

At the same time, elimination of Digital Gender Gap is one of necessary conditions for Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, which is one of 5 Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations.

Access to ICT is an important point, but in addition to this, we have to create favorable conditions for women to access ICT-related professions. To achieve this it is important to take necessary measures in education field and to support women and girls to be engaged in mathematics and exact sciences. Namely for this reason the International Telecommunication Union each April marks the international "Girls-in-ICT Day". The main purpose of this arrangement is to introduce opportunities provided by ICTs to women and girls and encourage them to get specialties and skills in this field.

The International Telecommunication Union jointly with UN Women structure started EQUACS initiative. This initiative embodies activities, with the participation of all interested players, aimed at eliminating digital gender gap in terms of opportunities, abilities and leadership.

Slide 10

In the next slide we see that expanding and deepening use of ICT can help to close the digital gender gap, empower people. As we see in the slide, inequalities in literacy, education, labor activities and incomes can lead to broader gender inequalities and digital gender gap. This rate in least developed countries is 31 percent, in developing countries – 16.8 percent, in developed countries – 2.8 percent. As we see the literacy rate among adult population increased to 86 percent from 76 percent in 1990. However, women still account for more than 60 percent of all world's illiterates. If the literacy rate of women in developed countries is 99 percent, in developing countries this indicator is 77%, in least developed countries – 53%. All developing regions have achieved or have almost reached an equal gender ratio at the level of primary education. However, there is still serious gender inequality at the levels of secondary and higher education.

Slide 11

Dear attendants of the panel,

As you know, the State Examination Center annually publishes and brings to the attention of the society broad statistic report on results of administered examinations. Gender issue occupies a special place in our analyses of each examination campaign. In this part of my speech I would like to share with you some data which can be interesting in the context of discussions at this panel.

Slide 12

The next slide demonstrates dynamics of applicants to the specialties of the 1st specialty group during last 25 years. Let me to bring to your attention that 1st group includes technical specialties. Let me note that in years 1993-94 medical specialties were also included in the first group, that's why indicators of those years don't reflect the real situation regarding technical specialties. As you see, boys have clear superiority among applicants of all years.

Slide 13

This slide reflects dynamics of percentage of girls among applicants to technical specialties. As you see, girls account for 35 percent of all applicants to this specialty group in 2017.

Slide 14

In this slide we see the dynamics by years of boys and girls admitted to specialties of the 1st group. If you pay attention, you will realize that proportion of girls in admitted applicants is bigger than that in overall applicants. We will see it clearly in the next slide.

Slide 15

As you see, proportion of girls in admitted applicants to specialties of the 1st group made about 40 percent in year 2017. If to take into account that the proportion of girls in applicants was about 35 percent, we can conclude that the girls prepare for exams better. At the same time, comparing to the year 1999, we observe a significant increase in number of girls admitted to this specialty group.

Slide 16

The next slide shows the dynamics of admission rate of girls applied to the 1st specialty group by years. The indicator in 2017 was above 40 percent.

Slide 17

In this slide we see the list of universities preferred by boys and girls admitted to 1st specialty group. As we see, boys in this group mostly prefer applied and practical specialties, whereas considerable part of girls chooses pedagogical specialties. This is the outcome of stereotypes rooted in the society.

Slide 18

Generally, studies reveal that the digital gender gap is closely related with other cultural, social and economic problems which the women are exposed to.

For example, Sida, the organization established by Swedish government to fight poverty in the world, listed the factors behind Digital Gender Gap in its report published in 2015. These factors are next:

Poverty

Women globally earn less than men and have less access to jobs, economic resources such as finances and land. This limits their possibility to use all forms of technology, including ICT.

Illiteracy

Women and girls make up nearly 2/3's of the world illiterates. This limits their use of ICT. It puts the onus on users of ICT for development approaches to include information and training suitable for those with low literacy rates.

Language barrier

In rural areas and among ethnic minorities women and girls often have lower education. They may only speak a local language or dialect and they face hindrances when accessing software, the Internet and using mobiles, as the predominant language is main national language or foreign languages.

Stereotypes

In many countries science and technology are viewed as more suitable for boys. This may lead girls to shy away from studying computer science or adopting new technology.

Cyberlaws are often gender blind.

When new laws concerning the internet are introduced, they usually have a general character and don't take into account specific problems of women. Social media platforms are often reluctant to deal with misogynist expressions, and government agencies are slow or hesitant in responding to online violence.

Slide 19

In the final part of my speech I want to inform you that since year 2011 The United Nations Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (UN-APCICT) and Azerbaijani government carry out cooperation for expanding ICT skills of civil servants and youth. Since year 2016 the State Examination Center follows up this cooperation.

Let me note that "Women ICT Frontier Initiative" (WIFI) is one of programs implemented by APCICT. The main target of the program is to increase ICT skills of woman entrepreneurs, to support business activities of women by using opportunities provided by ICTs, to develop women entrepreneurship and to provide access for woman entrepreneurs to ICT market.

Currently, the SEC carries out translation of modules included in the program and we intend to arrange trainings for woman entrepreneurs in the near future. For implementation of these activities SEC currently holds talks with public entities, who support business, especially woman entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan, like The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Issues and Ministry of Economy.

I think that implementation of WIFI program at the national level in cooperation with proper public organizations can make a special contribution to the development of woman entrepreneurship, ICT capacity building for woman entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan, enabling them to expand their businesses by using opportunities provided by ICTs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

None of us should forget that the society is a complex type of coexistence – kind of enormous family. Coexistence means either developing together or degrading together. If any social group is kept away from the development, new technologies, and human values in harmony with spirit of time, this will slow down development of all society or even cause degradation. Hopefully, we will be able to establish truly harmonic society based on mutual love and respect by fair and resposible use of opportunities provided by new technologies.

<u>Slide 20</u>

Thanks for your attention!