



Empowering Women Entrepreneurs through Information and Communications Technologies

A PRACTICAL GUIDE



UNCTAD CURRENT STUDIES ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

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PREFACE

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) are emerging as increasingly valuable business tools for women entrepreneurs in developing countries. Making sure that women entrepreneurs are equipped to make productive use of such technologies is important from the perspective of achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women and MDG 8 on a global partnership for development to make available the benefits of ICTs.

The rapidly changing ICT landscape, the influx of new innovations, infrastructure challenges and their interface with persisting age-long barriers relating to sociocultural norms, and institutional, systemic and legal gender inequalities which have impeded women's potential to start and grow their businesses is a complex terrain. Compounded by the scarcity of data on women's entrepreneurship and ICTs, gaining a clear picture of the status of women entrepreneurs and their use of ICTs is often difficult for policymaking purposes.

For this reason, UNCTAD and the International Labour Organization (ILO) partnered to develop, for the first time, a framework for the assessment of women's entrepreneurship development (WED) that systematically integrates the ICT dimension. The Framework and methodology, which were launched in 2013, strives to fill a void for WED practitioners and policymakers – including development agencies, government ministries, SME partners and the donor community – interested in formulating more effective policies in this area.

This guide has been produced by UNCTAD in collaboration with the ILO to help bring clarity to some of the key underlying ICT dynamics that are of relevance for women's entrepreneurship and to set out a method for conducting an assessment which integrates these dimensions. It aspires to serve as a comprehensive and valuable resource to support the formulation of evidence-based policies empowering women entrepreneurs through ICTs and to make possible the full leveraging of the potential and capacities of women entrepreneurs in particular in developing countries.

UNCTAD expresses its appreciation to the Government of Sweden for its funding of the ILO/UNCTAD Project on Leveraging ICTs in Support of Women's Entrepreneurship, which served as the basis for the preparation of this publication.

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The study draws heavily on the close collaboration with Joni Simpson and Virginia Rose Losada of the ILO on the initiative to integrate the dimension of ICTs in the ILO WED Framework and methodology.

The publication benefited significantly from discussions and inputs during several meetings that were organized jointly with the ILO: Focus Groups of Women Entrepreneurs (Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, April 2013), Assessors Training on WED and ICTs (Dar es Salaam, April 2013), WSIS Event on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs through ICTs (Geneva, Switzerland, May 2013), Seminar on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs through ICTs (Stockholm, October 2013) and a consultation session with WED assessors and other stakeholders (Stockholm, October 2013). The support for the meeting preparations from Jealous Chirove, Noreen Toroka, Deodatus Sylvester, and Elias Radelius was much appreciated.

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Many women entrepreneurs, in particular during the focus groups held in the United Republic of Tanzania, shared valuable inputs, comments and stories that have helped to enrich and validate the analysis. We also wish to thank the women entrepreneurs whose comments appeared in the video produced entitled “Empowering Women Entrepreneurs through ICTs: Voices from Africa”.

Inputs from members of the Community of Practice ICT4WED, an online network of experts on ICTs and women’s entrepreneurship, launched in March 2013, also contributed to the content of this publication. UNCTAD wishes to thank the following ICT4WED members in particular who contributed valuable comments: Cheikh Badiane, Ineke Buskens, Nicole Ehlermann-Cache, Yvonne Finch, Sophia Huyer, Dorothea Kleine, Henriette Kolb and Mark Levy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BDS	business development support
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ESCAP	Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
Eurostat	Statistical Office of the European Union
ICT	information and communications technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IP	Internet Protocol
IT	information technology
LDC	least developed country
MDG	Millenium Development Goal
MSE	micro and small-scale enterprise
MSME	micro, small and medium-sized enterprise
MMS	multimedia message service
NAP	national action plan
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSO	national statistical office
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PC	personal computer
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
SMS	Short Message Service
STI	science, technology and innovation
UIS	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics

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