

Statement by Ms. Rachel Mayanja
to the
Meeting of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Session: “ICT and Gender Equality: New Opportunities and Challenges for Public
Administration to implement IADGS including MDGs”
21 April 2010

Mr. Chair,
Members of the Committee of Experts,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration. I thank the Division for Public Administration and Management for its kind invitation to me to present a summary of the outcomes of the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. This review took place during the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women from 1 to 12 March this year. It is our hope that this summary will provide a framework to guide your discussion of the role of Governments and public administration in overcoming the remaining obstacles and challenges in achieving MDG3.

Mr. Chair,

In keeping with its multi-year programme of work, the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly and their contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals. The review provided an opportunity to assess progress made, and exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices to overcome the remaining gaps and challenges.

The 15 year review highlighted a number of areas in which progress had been made. For example, access to education had increased for girls at all levels, especially in primary education. Policies to address HIV/AIDS increasingly placed specific emphasis on prevention, treatment and care. To ensure that adequate funds were allocated for the health needs of both women and men, health budgets had been examined from a gender equality perspective. A growing number of States had comprehensive legal, policy, and institutional frameworks to end violence against women and girls. Quotas were instituted to strengthen women’s access and participation in decision-making processes and the gender mainstreaming strategy was increasingly applied across all sectors.

A variety of strategies and actions contributed to improving girls’ participation in primary, secondary and tertiary education, including action to make education

compulsory and free. By 2005, 95 per cent of 203 countries and territories had passed compulsory education laws. The trend towards abolishing or reducing school fees at the primary and/or secondary level continued, either as a policy applying to all children or as a targeted measure for girls, including girls from low income families and rural areas. Needless to say, learning and teaching had been facilitated by the proliferation of a variety of ICT tools and media, including the World Wide Web.

Despite progress in these and other areas, the 15 year review also noted that achievements for women and girls in many areas covered by the Millennium Development Goals, lagged behind overall gains. With regard to poverty, for example, there is evidence to suggest that women, especially those in developing countries, are disproportionately affected by poverty. Some female-headed households are among the poorest and most disadvantaged of all households. Unemployment remains higher for women than men, and the negative consequences of the current economic and financial crisis for women have been disproportionately high, given their limited access to financial markets. Illiteracy remains a serious constraint for women, who continue to account for nearly two thirds of the 776 million illiterate adults in the world. Women are also more likely to be malnourished than men since they have less access to food, especially when it is scarce. MDG 7 on environmental sustainability also has implications for women, especially rural women, who are particularly vulnerable to climate change, as they depend on local natural resources for their livelihood.

Mr. Chair,

Five years to the target date for the achievement of the MDGs, women continue to face disadvantages in all areas of the MDGs. Gender stereotypes, violence against women, and low representation of women in decision-making positions remain major challenges to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. The persistent disadvantage that women and girls face and their poorer performance in all areas of the MDGs suggest that insufficient attention is being given to the gender equality dimensions in national development policies and strategies related to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chair,

It is clear – gender equality and women's empowerment, as expressed by MDG 3, cannot be achieved if a gender gap remains in addressing other MDGs. This is a message that must resound with governments and public administration officials and must guide investments in all sectors.

Let me now turn to what opportunities exist for government and public administration officials to use ICT to turn the tide and to make gender equality and women's empowerment a reality.

The Report of the Secretary-General E/C.16/2010/4 on *“Information and communications technology and gender equality: new opportunities and challenges for*

public administration to implement the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals” highlights a number of key areas in which ICT can be used to enhance the achievement of the MDGs. It notes, for instance that ICT can help to achieve gender equality under goal 1 — eradicating extreme poverty and hunger — by providing real-time information on agriculture, weather, pricing and marketing to support women’s food production and income-earning enterprises, as well as helping women to care for their families and improve their living standard. That report also notes that with respect to goals 4 and 5 on reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, ICT can provide improved information on nutrition and agriculture, facilitate the formation of health networks and information to health professionals and monitor health trends while assisting the provision of primary health care. The report notes potential transformative effect of ICT in other areas of the MDGs as well.

The report before you also recognizes that e-strategies such as e-learning and e-health can contribute to the improvement of women’s livelihoods. For example women and girls’ access to education, educational and literacy programmes can be delivered specifically to poor girls and women using appropriate technologies. Teacher training can be administered online. ICT can assist in increasing women’s access to reproductive health information, including information on AIDS prevention. Information and communication programmes can also influence public opinion on gender equality and could assist in the elimination of persistent gender stereotypes and advocating for increased participation of women in decision-making positions. E-business ventures can create employment opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

Indeed, it is evident that substantial achievements have been made at the national level to enhance women’s access to and use of ICT. For example, women now have better access to a diverse range of information and services in the areas of banking, agriculture and health through the use of mobile phones, than ever before. ICT training programmes have been organized and information technology equipment provided to women entrepreneurs to increase their access to markets. Tele-centers have also been created in rural areas to increase women’s access to traditional and new ICT.

Mr. Chair,

While these achievements are laudable, what is clearly missing and that must become an urgent concern of Government and public administration officials everywhere is the need to ensure that ICTs do not deepen gender stereotypes; that their use does not promote the marketing of ideas and goods and services that foster the abuse and slavery of women and girls; that their ability to open up opportunities globally do not also become an opportunity to expose women and girls to uncontrolled risks and threats that can reverse the gender equality gains of recent decades. Lack of regulation of the use of ICTs is a major contributor to trafficking, which may disproportionately affect women and girls, especially those who are poor.

In addition to ensuring that ICTs provide avenues for completing the unfinished business of Beijing and for ensuring the mainstreaming of gender in the achievement of all MDGs, the design of ICT policies and strategies must focus on the inherent capacity of ICT to disempower women and girls. Governments must find ways to address them using e-government. Governments must enhance opportunities for women's participation through ICTs.

Mr. Chair,

The role of government and public administration must go beyond simply transforming women's access to economic resources to transforming their risk and vulnerability; from simply ensuring access to cell phones that allow rural women to make contacts with buyers of their produce, to making sure that their resources, privacy and safety are protected in an increasingly open and global economy.

How can this be achieved?

A major opportunity lies in e-Governance which opens opportunities for women's participation in governance. This should include opportunities for women and women's organizations to participate in the design and implementation of policies, in order to ensure that the needs and concerns of women are prioritized.

Availability of specific legislation on gender equality would facilitate the incorporation of gender equality perspectives in all policies and strategies, and strengthened implementation of gender mainstreaming to ensure that the needs and priorities of women and girls are systematically and effectively taken into consideration in the design, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of policies and programmes. Political commitment, leadership and strategic partnership are required, together with specific allocation of financial resources to successfully mainstream gender equality.

Mr. Chair,

In July this year, the Economic and Social Council Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) will focus on the topic of "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women" and later in September 2010, the General Assembly will convene a high-level meeting on the MDGs. These intergovernmental processes provide opportunities to emphasize and reiterate the importance of institutionalizing gender mainstreaming in order to address the specific needs and priorities of women and girls. The Committee of Experts for Public Administration can send a strong message to ECOSOC and the General Assembly that gender equality remains an important goal and that ICT provides a potent tool for advancing women's empowerment, whose risks must be managed even as benefits are harnessed.

I thank you.