

YOUNG WOMEN & ICT DIALOGUE AND THE JOINT LAUNCH OF THE GENDER & CHILDREN ICT STRATEGY

19 - 21 August 2015



Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS) Honourable Deputy Minister, Professor Hlengiwe Mkhize, opened the launch of the Gender & ICT and Children & ICT strategy at Golden Horse Hotel in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal on the 19th August 2015. The Deputy Minister indicated that the DTPS will not be able to implement this Strategy on its own and invited relevant organizations and government departments including parents to support and promote the strategy in all related platforms – full speech available here: <http://bit.ly/1hF1xcn>



The Strategy seeks to empower women to enable them to enter, participate and compete in the ICT sector. It also seeks to harness the benefits of ICTs for children's empowerment and their protection whilst interacting with ICT content, products, and services on different ICT platforms.

Young women and girls from three Provinces namely; KwaZulu Natal, Free State and Mpumalanga were invited to participate in a Young women and ICT Dialogue. This event was cited as a life changing experience for these young women, and being accommodated in a hotel was icing on the cake. SchoolNet's, Ms Hlengiwe Mfeka attended the event with other supporting stakeholders and partners.

Messages of support were presented by Mobinet, Childline SA, Media monitory, Autism SA and Umgungundlovu District Municipality.

The highlight of the day was when young women got to interact with the Deputy Minister. Ms Luleka Mbanjwa who is a student at University of KwaZulu Natal described the moment as a privilege and honour, not to mention the five Primary School girls from Piet Retief Primary who were equally overwhelmed. Some of the issues that were raised by these young women to the Deputy Minister were:

- KZN scholars and out of school youth 1*
1. Internet Connection and availability in schools
 2. Availability of computers and tablets in schools
 3. Issues of load shedding
 4. Teenage pregnancy
 5. Disability
 6. High Education bursaries

The Deputy Minister provided an opportunity to her Department Team to respond to raised challenges.

Later in the day Chief Director (Gender, Disability, Youth and Children), Ms Petronella Linders, opened the Young women in ICT Dialogue whereby she shared its objectives to facilitate the empowerment of children through ICTs by supporting initiatives implemented by government, civil society as well as private sector. The Department aims to create an enabling environment for women to use ICTs for their benefits and opportunities, as outlined in the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights.



Ms Nolwazi Sihlahla ended the first day on a high note when she made a presentation on Information Ethics which focused on *Digital Awareness* as one pillar of the strategy. She challenged young women in the room by posing questions such as, “How do I become a good cyber citizen?” She encouraged the youth to enhance their intellectual capabilities in order to combat information poverty. She conveyed a strong message, “STOP AND THINK BEFORE YOU ACT” and focussed on making conscious decisions based on long term consequences.

The second day was packed with exciting and inspiring presentations which focused on issues affecting the youth and working through recommendations. Young women were given an opportunity to engage with each presenter after their talk. The topics covered were Entrepreneurship, Skills development, Employment, Gender Based Violence and Self-Actualisation. The presentations encouraged and motivated young women to start thinking of ideas on how to start and get help with building successful and sustainable businesses and seizing opportunities to develop their skills.

After lunch, four commission groups were formed which consisted about 20 people per group. The task of the groups was to identify two challenges in the above-mentioned five topics and then suggest solutions or make recommendations for each including existing projects or initiatives that

are already available in their Provinces. The room was buzzing with discussions within the group members, and the DTPS team had to force groups to stop as the time was close to supper – team members were promised some time the following day before the plenary.

The third and last day was very interesting as the young women shared with their peers some of the



issues they are facing in their respective Provinces. It was also interesting to learn about other initiatives already in place to assist with the implementation of the strategy. One of the relevant initiatives mentioned from one presentation was ‘She will Connect’ a global project initiated by Intel which supports the Gender and ICT Strategy and promotes women empowerment through ICT. The Strategy identifies the following areas of intervention as priority areas:

1. Women and new media technologies
2. Access to ICT infrastructure
3. Access to ICT Services by Women
4. ICT Impact on Socio-Economic Development
5. ICT Skills Development
6. Women, Power and Decision Making Processes
7. Women and Economy

All or most of the above-mentioned areas are addressed by the Intel ‘She will connect’ initiative which is coordinated by SchoolNet SA. The DTPS found feedback useful and will continue the dialogue in the remaining provinces to gain the national perspective. It is projected that that implementation will begin next year.

It was a mind and body exhausting but fruitful event for all!

Ms Hlengiwe Mfeka
SchoolNet SA
www.schoolnet.org.za

August 2015