

## **Digital Divide and Women in Developing Countries**

There has always been a gap between those people and communities who can make effective use of technologies and those who cannot. Unequal adoption of technology excludes many from reaping the benefits of the technology. Digital divide exists both within individuals, communities, cities, regions and nations. The access and use of information and communication technologies is linked to economic, social and political development. Therefore the women in developing countries should understand the significance of these technologies and use these for their betterment. The ways in which information technology is developed, structured and used will influence how nations can reach national capabilities and leapfrog some of the traditional barriers to development.

The Digital Divide is presently at the center of international development concerns. The United Nations considers access to information technology as the third most important issue facing women globally, after poverty and violence against women. Internet is a key engine of change, and the platform for new productivity-enhancing technologies. According to UN Human Development Report, industrialized countries, with only 15% of the world's population, are home to 88% of all Internet users. Less than 1% of people in developing countries are online even though it is home to eighty percent of the world's population. Women comprise almost half of this population. Reliable statistics on the use of Internet by women in developing countries are not available. According to available data Women are 22 % of all Internet users in Asia, 38% of those in Latin America and 6% of those in Middle East. This indicates that most women in developing countries are the victim of the digital divide. The question arises How to close the gap? As realizing the existence of problem is the first step towards its solution.

### **Objectives, content, format and audience of the panel:**

The objective of this panel is to focus on the issue of digital divide in relation to women in developing countries. The current available gender sensitive statistics in the field of information technology will be presented. The opportunities created for women and challenges posed to their participation in the workforce for reaping the benefits offered by information and communication technologies will be explored. In order to transform the divide into an opportunity for growth and development its causes, short/long term effects and measures to alleviate the digital divide will be discussed. The discussion will include how government policies and cultural/social environment affect the digital divide.

The panelist will present the situation in developing countries in their respective continent and there will be a moderated dialogue between the panelist and audience. The session length would be 1-2 hour depending on the availability of the time. Anybody interested in and concerned with bridging the digital divide in developing countries would be welcome. The panel intends to provide a focal point for women from developing countries attending the conference, so that they can meet and network and open the door for more in-depth discussion about policies and opportunities to decrease the digital divide. The panel will provide the attendees a perspective about current

scenario of access to technology in developing countries in Asia, Africa, and South America.

**Speakers, Affiliation and Qualifications:**

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Naseem Bhatti holds M.Sc. from University of the Punjab, Pakistan. She has a number of national/international publications. She is member of ACM and IEEE. She holds national award of Pride of Performance in Computer Science. Her research interests include programming languages, use of computers in education and women and computing

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Dr Dilma holds B.Sc. and M.Sc. from University of Sao Paulo, Brazil and Ph.D from Georgia Institute of Technology, USA. She has been working as assistant professor at University of Sao Paulo (largest university in South America) from 1997 to Sept 2000. She is still a member of the graduate faculty and advisor for 2 Master' s students. She is a research scientist at IBM TJ Watson Research Center since Oct 2000.

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Dr Galpin is a lecturer and her research interests include perceptions of computing, computer science education, women and computing, and concurrency. She is the ACM-W Ambassador for South Africa.