

**COM/CITEL DEC. 104 (XXXV-18)<sup>1</sup>**

**SUBMISSION OF RURAL WOMEN'S ALLIANCE EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN THROUGH ICTs TO PCC.I AND PCC.II**

The 35 Meeting of the Permanent Executive Committee of CITEL, COM/CITEL,

**DECIDES:**

- 1) To submit to the 34 Meeting of the Permanent Consultative Committee I: Telecommunications/ICT (PCC.I) and to the 33 Meeting of the Permanent Consultative Committee II: Radiocommunications (PCC.II) the text of Rural Women's Alliance – Empowering Rural Women through ITCs which was subscribed in Mar del Plata, Argentina, on December 17, 2018 in order to analyze, within the framework of their capacities, the best way to contribute in the quest to achieve said goals.
- 2) To request that both Committees report to COM/CITEL on the progress of the implementation of the Alliance.

**ANNEX I TO DECISION COM/CITEL/DEC. 104 (XXXV-18)**

**RURAL WOMEN'S ALLIANCE  
EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN THROUGH ICTs  
*Mar del Plata, Argentina, December 17, 2018***

The Member States of the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) of the Organization of American States (OAS), Associate Members of a Permanent Consultative Committee of CITEL and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) organizations and companies, and the Secretariat of CITEL, hereby declare as follows:

According to the ITU, in 2016 approximately 3.9 billion people were still without access to the Internet; in the Americas, the rate was one third of the population.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in 2015 the rural population of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) was just over 129 million across 33 countries, representing nearly 21% of the total population.<sup>3</sup> Of that total, almost half are women; of those women, nearly 20% are from indigenous communities.

Women make up nearly 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries and, if they had the same access to production resources as men, could increase their production yields by 20% to 30%.

The gender gap in Latin America today keeps access to ICTs out of reach for 49% of the 149 million women in the region<sup>4</sup> with average or low income.

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<sup>1</sup> COM/CITEL doc. 214/18

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2016.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7916s.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/GSM0001\\_03232015\\_GSMAReport\\_NEWGRAYS\\_spa\\_web.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/GSM0001_03232015_GSMAReport_NEWGRAYS_spa_web.pdf)

The World Economic Forum indicated that although a lot of work has been focused on closing this gap, even greater efforts will be required to accelerate the process since, at the current rate, it would take 79 years to close the gap in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, aware of both this situation and the fact that ICTs can drive economic, political and social empowerment, and constitute the foundation for the proliferation of education and health, among other things, adequate hardware that enables connectivity in remote or underserved areas is necessary. Considering the foregoing, we are concerned about the current gap in access to and use of ICTs by women in rural areas. As such, we have decided to join forces to contribute to the empowerment of women through the mass use of ICTs to meet their specific and strategic needs.

We hereby underscore the importance of rural women as key agents in the development of regional economies and the relevance of their central positioning in policies and projects since, as stated by UN Women, *empowering them is key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity.*

In this regard, the Secretary General of the United Nations, inaugurating the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62), highlighted that *achieving gender equality is the greatest human rights challenge of our time.* Along the same lines, the Executive Director of UN Women stated that *women, especially in rural areas, need connectivity and innovative tools in addition to access to financial and other services.*

In analyzing the gender gap in the region in greater detail, it cannot be overlooked that among affected women, those who live in rural areas are at a disadvantage not only when it comes to access to and use of ICTs given their status as women, but also as compared to the access enjoyed by women in urban areas.

One of the main stumbling blocks in the development of plans that would equip rural women with tools is the lack of attention given to the issue, which is why they are not addressed in a large number of public policies or private initiatives, leading to scarce access to production resources: rural women receive only 10% of production resources and 5% of technical assistance.

Similarly, the lack of skills and confidence to use digital technologies is another stumbling block that rural women must overcome; added to lower literacy rates, this lack of digital skills limits rural women's opportunity to use existing resources found on the Internet.<sup>6</sup>

Within the framework of CITELE, the Buenos Aires Declaration recognized the need to adopt public policies aimed at resolving the issues that affect our people, in particular women and girls, by focusing on improving the quality and diversity of ICT services, primarily in remote or underserved areas, in accordance with the Objectives of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan.

In this regard, we believe it is necessary to create this Alliance and answer the call of UN Women, commemorating the International Day of Rural Women on October 15 – the theme of which was *“Sustainable infrastructure, services and social protection for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”* – to forge ahead with improvements to ICT-related public services and infrastructure for this sector of the population.

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<sup>5</sup> Global Gender Gap Report – WEF – available at: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2017/key-findings/>

<sup>6</sup> W20 Argentina Concept Note: Digital Inclusion [http://w20argentina.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CN\\_Digital\\_Inclusion\\_v2.pdf](http://w20argentina.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CN_Digital_Inclusion_v2.pdf)

For all these reasons, we undertake to:

- recognize rural women as part of the underdeveloped population which still needs to be equipped with connectivity and the skills required to benefit from ICT tools to further their development, autonomy and empowerment.
- promote actions designed to enhance connectivity in rural areas and access to new technologies, thereby shrinking the gender gap in said areas.
- promote policies that promote that the Internet is safe for the use of women and girls.
- join forces and identify strategic partners to help empower women in rural areas through capacity-building and digital services that enable them to flourish, using ICTs as a platform.
- develop strategies that make use of ICTs as facilitators of the economic empowerment and greater independence of rural women.
- develop an action plan, the backbone of which is the deployment of infrastructure, capacity-building, technological access and promotion of entrepreneurship and other activities, in accordance to the plans and programs of each country by making intensive and innovative use of ICTs, promoting best practices in community networks that address the specific needs of each community, with special emphasis on those developed and managed by women in rural or underserved areas.
- continue projects that aim to promote gender equality and the shrinking of inequality gaps in the information society.
- disseminate this undertaking with the objective of garnering more supporters who share its guidelines and will collaborate in the achievement of its objectives.

To do so, the undersigned parties will join forces to empower rural women in the Americas by, for instance:

- promoting programs that provide connectivity to rural, remote and underserved areas.
- establishing sustainable community network projects that are run by women, wherever possible and whenever relevant in coordination with operators.
- developing training on the digital ecosystem for women and girls in rural areas, focused on driving the growth of economies and productive processes in these areas.
- encouraging ICT training in said areas, making it possible to pass on lessons to other women.
- developing area-based repositories with local content that that integrates information on the promotion of women and girls empowerment through ICTs can be used by the community.
- promoting the dissemination of best practices in public policies that cause an impact on the rights of rural women as regards their development, autonomy and empowerment;
- training women entrepreneurs in the identified areas for commercial development through ICTs.

Signed on December 17, 2018 in Mar del Plata, Republic of Argentina.