

Universal and meaningful connectivity: Are the SDGs fit for purpose to report on progress for women and girls in technology? An approach for gender mainstreaming of the digital ecosystem

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) / Broadband Commission

Summary of text:

At present, women are 25% less likely than men to have the basic knowledge required to access digital technology, four times less likely to know how to program, and 13 times less likely to file for a technology patent. Although girls and young women often outperform boys and young men in STEM education in developed countries, this has not corresponded to a narrowing of the gender gap in STEM leadership. Factors which inhibit women from progressing in technical fields include gendered social norms, and a lack of necessary infrastructure and funding, female mentors and role models, capacity building, and training.

Although policies and strategies aimed at bridging this gender disparity have been instituted by some governments, they are not ubiquitous. Gender is referenced in only half of national overarching ICT policies or Master Plans and over 40% of countries have no meaningful policies or programs to expand women's access to the Internet. In regions where there are fewer women involved in the policymaking process, the development of equitable gender policies is precarious.

Key recommendations:

- Efforts to increase network coverage, capacity and quality should be supported, particularly in underserved areas where a significant proportion of the population are women.
- Awareness campaigns, digital literacy programmes and formal education programmes should be leveraged to raise awareness of the threats that prevent women from accessing and using the Internet, and how they can be addressed or reduced. Awareness should also be raised of the potential benefits of women's access to and use of Internet-enabled content, applications, and services.
- The development of online content and services, including government services, which are accessible to women with limited literacy and digital skills should be supported. Women from these demographics should be included in the pilot and user testing stages of these services.
- To create a policy environment with a meaningful gender lens, policymakers in target regions should identify existing gender mainstreaming practices and any institutionalized coordination mechanisms in place. Projects should be aligned with the objectives of the respective region's national ICT policies, Master Plans or national strategic documents. Policymakers should consider leveraging the resources of institutions such as the national post office, which is likely to have offices throughout the country, to assist with logistical matters.