Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-second Session

Participation in and access of women to the media, and
information and communications technologies and their impact
on and use as an instrument for the advancement and
empowerment of women

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

Innovative data approaches for measuring progress on
gender equality and women's empowerment

Safe, Open and Gender-Responsive Data: Experiences across Africa

by

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Background

29 years ago, on March 12, Sir Tim Berners-Lee rolled out the World Wide Web as a free development space for humanity. In his words, it was "for everyone". Today, the open and free web is an incredibly powerful tool to empower individuals and inspire collective action. It has replaced the old paradigm that allowed a few powerful actors to control one-to-many communication with a new, decentralised, borderless and non-hierarchical world of many-to-many communications. In 2018, we will pass a significant threshold: 50% of the world will be online. This milestone will mark the first time the scales have been tipped toward more people connected than not, and speaks to the impressive growth of the internet — just ten years ago, barely over 20% of the world's population was online.

For the first time in human history, we are within reach of a society where everyone has the potential to have equal access to knowledge, voice and the ability to create. This new "networked public sphere" is fostering transparency, opening up choices, and enabling citizens to participate directly in shaping and improving their lives, their communities, and their world. Still, this is not the case for everyone, particularly women and girls. Web Foundation research shows that women in poor, urban communities are up to 50% less likely than men to be connected — and recent research shows that this digital gender gap is growing wider.

The intersection of the web and data is in the capacity for everyone to use the web to participate freely and fully in decision-making and demand accountability from those who hold power. The web has made it possible for data and information fundamental to sustainable development, to democratic accountability and the public good to be openly released online. Furthermore, governments across the world are able to use web technology and open data creatively to solve public policy challenges. But, without addressing the digital gender gap, neither access to the web or good data can achieve these aims for women and for everyone in a society.

Key considerations

While the global goals recognise that data is an outcome, they also emphasise that data is key to implement and achieve these goals for every last woman and girl. Our common challenge, then, is that,

- By 2020, we enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing states, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts (Goal 17, Target 17.18)
- By 2030, we build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries (Goal 17, Target 17.19)

Key thought

"*The divide between people who have internet access and those who do not is deepening existing inequalities — inequalities that pose a serious global threat. Unsurprisingly, you're more likely to be offline if you are female, poor, live in a rural area or a low-income country, or some combination of the above. To be offline today is to be*

excluded from opportunities to learn and earn, to access valuable services, and to participate in democratic debate."

> *- Sir Tim Berners-Lee, March 12, 2018. #HappyBirthdayWWW*

Challenges as experienced across Africa

In keeping with its vision and its Five-Year Strategy, the Web Foundation has been engaging in policy and programme implementation targeted at women and working with global development partners, policy makers, civil society and the technology community engaged with data. The greatest challenges encountered in Africa have been on three major areas:

1. ***Data Availability***
   a. Data availability: Active data gathering culture is lacking and gaps still exist in major thematic areas, like energy and climate. Only two countries in sub-Saharan Africa — Kenya and South Africa — rank in the top 50 on the Open Data Barometer (A total of 25 Africa countries were assessed.)
   b. Data generation: Lack of capacity and resources to generate data. The Open Data Barometer findings reveal that governments are too dependent on third parties for creating and sustaining open data initiatives.
   c. Data accessibility: Available data is mostly non-digital and is found at official locations, mainly in cities.
   d. Data relevance: The data that is available is not the data that is most useful to women, who seek day-to-day data on childcare, health, trade, land use, energy, crop trends, geo-localised farming and weather information and government spending.

2. ***Data Use***
   a. Data demand: The existing power structure does not encourage nor empower women to demand needed data.
   b. Data use and innovation: Available data sets do not allow for easy exploration, interoperability and comparability. Only two out of 375 datasets evaluated in Africa are truly open.
   c. Data illiteracy: Basic literacy levels in Africa are still relatively low. When needed data is packed in an elitist, huge-volume, high-level way, it becomes impossible for everyday citizens to engage.
   d. Closed data culture: The attitude of secrecy on public information and the fear of an "educated" citizenship, coupled with possible new media power is a huge challenge to data holders. One may add to this, the power held by officials who hold data and the possible monetary value that is being/ can be accrued by holding instead of opening data.

3. ***Data Policy***
   a. Inconsistency in Freedom of Information legal frameworks: Though constitutions generally allude to freedom of information, more than half the countries in Africa still do not have a Freedom of Information (FoI) Act or a Right to Information (RTI) law. This sets back the legal and policy implementation of innovative data

approaches. Though African states engage "globally", the political will to implement "locally" is still a challenge.

b. Data reliability: There has been reticence on official data collaboration from citizens, especially when data is being seen as used for political or similar interests.

c. Lack of trust: As digital data gathering increases, threats linked to the misuse of personal data and the lack of capacity for personal data protection is growing on the consumer side. [Inadequate data privacy laws and non-implementation of laws](#) when they exist are making citizens withdraw trust and hold back data.

How is Africa facing these challenges?

Some good initiatives are emerging in Africa and are worth investing in for greater innovation and progress. These include:

1. [The Africa Data Consensus](#), which stipulated "open by default" for public data.
2. Global data partnerships, like the Global Partnership on Sustainable Development Data, and other standard-setting initiatives like the [Open Data Charter](#).
3. Data communities that are organically grown and maintained, including hubs, co-working spaces, labs, hackerspaces and mapping.
4. Infomediaries, and applications that build on Africa's leadership in mobile technology.
5. Multistakeholder [ecosystems](#) to improve data in Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Senegal.
6. The Consolidated Africa Gender Index to improve coherence, reduce duplication and reduce demands on countries to provide information.

Expectations

What are the policy steps that countries can take to close the existing data gap and ensure that no one is left behind? Rapid progress is possible to address the digital gender gap if policymakers take immediate action to **REACT** — that is, to focus on **R**ights, **E**ducation, **A**ccess, **C**ontent, and **T**argets — on data:

Rights: Data is a right. The right to data is only an extension of the right to information, Freedom of Expression and right to privacy. Access to the web/internet and online data is, in itself, a right a and a public good, that underpins ow other rights are exercised. We must ensure that women and girls are viewed as rights holders and that policy, legislative, and regulatory processes uphold these rights.

Education: Use education to equip everyone – especially women – with the skills they need to access and use data, offline and on the web effectively. Our research shows that education is the most powerful tool we have to have close the data gap. We must include digital skills in primary and secondary school curricula in every country around the world, especially targeted at girls; we must also take steps to eradicate the gender gap in access to higher and tertiary education by ensuring that women have equal access to tertiary education opportunities.

Access: Public data should be accessible and open by default. The [International Open Data Charter](#) challenges countries to step up to data that is timely and comprehensive, accessible and usable, comparable and interoperable; while the [Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data](#) calls on national statistical offices to embrace the open data initiative and ensure that stakeholders of the national statistical system are part of the process.

Content: Governments need to ensure relevant and empowering data for women is available and used. Unless available data is valuable and empowering, people will not use it. Governments can play an important role here both by providing vital data and services online and by ensuring important content is available in local languages. As content and service delivery providers, governments must ensure that critical government data relevant to women, including information on sexual and reproductive health, legal rights, budget, expenditure, contracting, and financial services is readily available online in local languages.

Targets: Governments need to set and measure concrete gender equality targets*.* We want every country in the world to update their development targets as mandated by the SDGs, including clearly laying out how they will close the gender gap and for data on progress towards these targets to be regularly published in open formats so that everyone can keep tabs on progress and work on creative solutions in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Looking forward
The World Wide Web Foundation is engaged at global, regional and some national level actions on gender and data. In 2015, we collaborated with the African Union Commission, the Economic Commission for Africa, the UNDP and African data communities to birth the Africa Data Consensus. In 2016, we pioneered the first national multistakeholder gender data forum in Côte d'Ivoire. In 2017, we pioneered the first data and gender continental civil society engagement with the African Development Bank and more than thirty organisations. In 2018, we will be working with more African stakeholders to build evidence and power action towards innovative data approaches for measuring progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as well as the Feminist Open Government agenda.

About the World Wide Web Foundation
The Web Foundation advances the legacy of the open web by fighting for digital equality. Its programmes are based on an iterative, participatory and evidence-based model of policy change. It is collaborating with partners in over 70 countries and has a Consultative Status with ECOSOC.

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