



Concept Note

Grassroots leadership and transformation: Charting the path of empowerment through technology and skill development

Hosted by

The Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in partnership with W20, the official engagement group of G20 on women's economic empowerment

Date: 16 March 2023

Time: 3 PM to 4.15 PM EST

Venue: Conference room 2, Conference Building
United Nations, New York

Objective & event focus

- To discuss key challenges and issues in ensuring universal access to internet and technology
- To deliberate on technological innovations and practices in empowering women and girls
- To chart out a road map on skilling girls and women to bridge the gap in workforce participation as well as in access and use of technology

Background

Digital transformation provides new avenues for the economic empowerment of women and can contribute to greater gender equality. The Internet, digital platforms, mobile phones and digital financial services offer ample opportunities for women and girls and can help bridge the divide by enabling them to earn additional income, increase their employment opportunities, and enhance their network through social media.

While Information Communication Technology (ICT) is recognized as having the potential to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, a digital gender divide has been identified, whereby women and girl's access and use ICTs less than men and boys, which exacerbates gender inequalities. The digital divide can be explained as the inequalities between the digital haves and the have-nots in terms of their access to the internet and the ICTs. With the onset of unprecedented technological and digital advances in today's time, the world is witnessing a widening inequality between the digital haves and have-nots.

Globally, over 1 billion new Internet users have been added over the last five years. The COVID-19 pandemic sparked a surge in Internet use and in 2020, an estimated 466 million people began using the Internet for the first time. By mid-2022, 5.3 billion people were online, over 63 per cent of the world population. Yet just over a third of the world's people (2.7 billion) do not use the Internet. Many of them live in least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and small island developing states (SIDS).

Globally, in 2020, 76% of households in urban areas had access to the Internet at home, almost twice as much as in rural areas (39%). Connectivity gaps in rural areas are especially serious in LDCs, where 15% of the rural population lives in areas with no mobile coverage at all, and 10% of the rural population is covered by only a 2G network.

As per ITU's World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database, only 43 percent of the population in India uses the internet. The IAMAI-Kantar Report ICUBE 2020 suggests that there are 58 percent male internet users and 42 percent female internet users in India.

India over the last 7 years has become a prominent nation in deploying technologies for transforming the lives of its citizens. Government initiatives such as National Digital Literacy Mission and the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan had been introduced to increase digital literacy and a total of 5.36 million people were trained, out of which around 42% candidates were from rural India. Several young, talented youth who are well conversant in information technology have set up Common Service Centers (CSCs) as Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) at the Panchayat level.

Without increased digital adoption and use, girls will have fewer employment opportunities and will face additional barriers to workforce participation. Closing the digital divide for women and girls' needs tailored understanding and actions for each of these barriers. Access to devices and internet services, skills, resources, and safety concerns: these are the factors that are almost universally listed as contributing to the gender digital divide. Some reports also list social norms as a factor after the first three. In order to be a part of the digital knowledge economy, the call to bridge the gap and digital inclusion has grown louder.

Guiding Questions

What are the barriers to ensure equitable access to internet and technology especially for women and girls? How these barriers can be addressed?

What steps should be taken to enhance the role of technology in the field of education, skill development, financial inclusion and access to credit and finance?

What are lessons learned, challenges and best practices in deployment of modern technologies for economic empowerment of women around the world?

What role civil society and private sector can play to bridge the gender digital divide?

How to address the challenge of online hate speech and violence against women and girls especially on social media platforms?

Moderator:

Ms. Dharitri Patnaik, Chief Coordinator, W20 India and Chair of W20 Task Force on Bridging the Gender Digital Divide

Speakers:

H.E. Ms. Smriti Irani, Hon'ble Minister of Women and Child Development, Government of India (TBC) [Video message]

H.E. Ms. Ruchira Kamboj, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations

H.E. Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women

Dr. Sandhya Purecha, Chair of W20

Panelists:

Dr. Jyoti Kiran Shukla, Economist & Policy Expert

Ms. Bharati Ghosh, Former Indian Police Service officer & Former UN official

Ms. Cheryl Miller, W20 EU

Ms. Susan Jane Ferguson, Country Representative at UN Women India

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