

Innovation Tank: addressing the digital gender gap in rural communities

Concept Note

16th of March 2023 9.30 AM Eastern US Time / 2.30 PM Central European Time

CSW67: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls

Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards. The sixty-seventh session (CSW67) will take place from 6 to 17 March 2023.

This year's priority theme, "*Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls*", will facilitate exploration of the impact the digital gender gap has on widening economic and social inequalities, as well as the importance of protecting the rights of women and girls in digital spaces and addressing online and digitally-facilitated gender-based violence.

IFAD, in collaboration with the World Bank's Gender Innovation Lab, will host an online side-event to stimulate reflection and discussion on innovations and digital technologies for the empowerment of rural women and girls. We will create an interactive and engaging space wherein guest speakers and audience members, through critical sharing and thinking, would inspire others and support the adoption of new successful practices.

Background

People living in rural areas, especially farmers in the Global South, face what is known as the [triple divide](#). This is a digital, rural and gender divide, which has the effect of relegating rural women to the most marginalized position when it comes to access to, and use of, digital technology and innovation.

Amid the growing reliance and opportunities associated with digital technology and innovation, a harsh facet of gender inequality and the disempowerment of women has emerged – a phenomenon known as the digital gender gap, whereby women and girls face disproportionate barriers to the access and/or use of such technologies, compared to their male counterparts. This proves a particularly limiting factor in rural contexts. In developing countries, the internet penetration rate for adult women is 41%, while it stands at 53% for men. In the least developed countries (LDCs), such percentages are as low as 19% and 31% respectively. In fact,, in many of these, men are 50% more likely to be online than women.

Research has shown that women farmers have limited access to agricultural information, which is a major barrier to the adoption of sustainable agricultural innovation. Traditional in-person agricultural systems have often neglected the role of women in agriculture. Agricultural extension agents are mostly men and they tend to offer advisory services primarily to male farmers. Limited mobility of women coupled with cultural sensitivities about male extension agents providing information to female farmers has also limited the reach of traditional extension to women farmers, and limited the potential welfare gains that technology adoption could offer¹.

But why does this digital gender gap exist? First, rural women often lack the basic means to access digital devices services—such as mobile phones and the internet – due to the harsh reality of income inequality. Second, discriminatory norms in some countries and/or rural settings, limit women’s education and financial literacy, or access to digital devices and services. Third, as mentioned, the global share of women in STEM fields remains drastically low. Fourth, fears around privacy, safety and security due to digital gender-based violence serve as deterrents to engage in digital spaces. The list goes on, yet governments largely remain slow to introduce specific policies to promote access to digital technologies among women.

It is also important to consider the acceleration of technological changes, particularly digitalisation, that has occurred as a result of COVID-19. Now more than ever, we need to ensure that women are not left behind as our societies start to rebuild.

Without increased adoption of digital technology and innovation, rural women and girls will continue to face increasing barriers to socio-economic empowerment, are more expose to climate shocks and crises, and have a weaker role in food systems and agro-food value chains. In fact, gender inequality and the urban-rural divide will likely worsen without intentional mitigative action. Such action can broadly be categorised into four key target areas:

1. Increased access to, and use of, digital technologies in rural areas
2. Increased acquisition of skills needed to use digital technologies and participate in their associated innovation, design and production
3. Advocate for gender-equitable national or regional ICT policy that address the triple divide
4. Increased protection of the rights of rural women and girls in digital spaces, including against ICT-facilitated gender-based violence.

Against this background, IFAD is accelerating its support for the use of ICTs and digital tools among small-scale farmers in rural areas across the world, with a specific focus on rural women and girls. At the same time, the Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) is seeking to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets and agency and the role digital technology and innovation can play in this.

During this side-event, we will make space for a dynamic discussion on how to address the “triple divide” and shape the digital landscape to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of rural women.

¹ IFAD Quarterly report Sept 2021 – Feb 2022, Pakistan

Objectives

- Provide understanding of the “triple divide” that exists in terms of access to, and use of, digital technologies.
- Identify, and facilitate discussion around, existing pro-poor and/or inclusive digital technologies that been successful in addressing the “triple divide”.
- Champion a clear message that gender-responsive action towards digital technologies and innovation is urgently needed in order to mitigate the marginalising impacts of the “triple divide”.

Event format

The event will commence with a welcome address from identified person from the WB GIL (tbc).

Proceedings will then move to the Innovation Tank, whereby a panel of experts and practitioners will, in turn, present or "pitch" mechanisms by which the digital gender gap can be tackled head-on. These can be based on established/implemented interventions, or on innovative new ideas or projects. During the Tank, we will have two beneficiary representatives contributing via pre-recorded video.

Once all innovations have been pitched, the floor will open to the audience and the moderator will facilitate a meaningful Q+A session.

Finally, the event will be closed with words from Ms. Kathie Meighan, IFAD’s Associate Vice-President & General Counsel

Tentative agenda

TIME (EST)

9.30 - 9.35 AM Welcome address (5mins)

- Antonique M. Koning, Gender Lead & Senior Financial Sector Specialist, Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP)

9.35 - 9.45 AM Keynote Speech (10mins)

- Ms. Su Kahumbu, CEO, Green Dreams TECH Ltd

9.45 - 10.05 AM IFAD Innovation Tank pitches

- Moderator: Ms. Maria Elena Mangiafico, Knowledge Management Specialist, IFAD
- Panellists:
 - Ms. Meera Misha, Country Programme Officer in the Asia Pacific Region, IFAD
 - Ms. Brenda Gunde, Global Senior Technical Specialist ICT4D, IFAD
 - Ms. Peninah Wanja, Founder and Managing Director, Farmingtech Solutions
 - Ms. Estelle Kossoubé, Senior Economist at the WB Africa Gender Innovation Lab

10.05 - 10.35 AM Q&A

- Moderated by Ms. Maria Elena Mangiafico

10.35 - 10.40 AM Closing address

- Ms. Kathie Meighan, Associate Vice-President & General Counsel, IFAD