

DIGITAL SKILLING FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS' ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN AFRICA

Side Event Theme: *“Digital skills and Gender Economic Inclusion”*

Structure of the event: Panel Discussion

Date: Thursday, 9th of March 2023

Time: 3 pm - 4:15 PM

Background

Africa is home to the world's youngest population, with over 60% of the continent's population under the age of 25. This youth population presents a significant opportunity for Africa's digital economy, as young people are more likely to be tech-savvy and embrace digital technologies. According to research conducted by the World Bank, investing in digital skills training could lead to significant economic gains for African countries. The report suggests that increasing digital skills could lead to a 1.5% increase in GDP growth and a 0.5% increase in productivity growth per year.

The African Union's Agenda 2063 recognizes the need to equip young people with the digital skills necessary to participate in the digital economy. It focuses on skills development and job creation for young people, and several countries have launched initiatives to provide digital skills training. For example, Kenya's Digital Literacy Program aims to provide primary school students with digital skills, while South Africa's Youth Employment Service aims to provide work experience and skills training to young people.

However, with the rapid advancements of technological and digital sectors in Africa, there is a risk of leaving women and girls behind due to a persisting gendered digital divide that hinders women's and girls' abilities to access essential services, navigate the digital world safely and efficiently, participate in the digital economy, and access the free flow of data and information. This resonates in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the male-female ratio for participation in technology at 80-20, per the International Finance Corporation's e-economy Africa 2020 report.

Also, across Africa, there are several reasons cited in economic literature for the large gap between male and female labor force participation rates on the continent, top of the list is the low supply of employable female labor to the market. However, an increase in women's labor force participation has been linked to higher and sustainable economic growth and lower poverty. This problem is easily solved by exposing and providing women and girls in the region with opportunities to learn globally

and locally demanded technology skills, allowing for remote work, foreign exchange earnings and the development of new technology-centric ventures to the benefit of their immediate and extended society.

Globally, women make up 28.4 per cent of the workforce engaged in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and only 30 per cent on average in sub-Saharan Africa. With recent advances in technology, the future of work continues to receive global attention on the need to invest in tech talents critical for the 4th industrial revolution (4IR). This requires investing more in digital skills training for women and girls to ensure they are not left behind.

The event provides a collaborative platform for various stakeholders focused on bridging Africa's gender digital divide to discuss the progress made so far, the current gaps, constraints and how to strengthen Governmental, inter-sectoral and inter-organizational efforts to drive robust, institutionalized, and sustainable growth for women and girls across Africa.

Objectives

1. To discuss the challenges facing women and girls' participation in Africa's technology ecosystem; accessibility, stereotypes, and other participation inhibitor's role and the role it plays in the achievement of the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy.

Topics to be addressed

- Digital skilling landscape across Africa, the progress made so far, the current gaps, constraints and the potential of digital skilling of young people in Africa (especially women) to create new pathways out of poverty and empower people in new ways through digital jobs matching, entrepreneurship etc.
- Current state of Africa's digital infrastructure and the role it plays in the digital transformation process in Africa.
- Creation of a conducive enabling environment across Africa will promote the growth of the digital industry through effective policy and regulatory changes that have maximum impact on young people, especially for women living in vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Proposed Agenda

| S/N | ACTIVITY | TIME ALLOCATION |
|-----|---|-----------------|
| 1 | <p>Panel Session Topic: <i>Digital skills and Gender Economic Inclusion</i></p> <p>Moderator: Kristonia Lockhart, Lead, Gender Specialist, Islamic Development Bank</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Kirsten Young, Director, Sustainability Programs, American Tower Corporation b) Andrea Russo, Field Enablement and GTM Lead, Microsoft c) Oyinkan Akintola-Bello, Digital Access Program Officer, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office d) Oladiwura Oladepo, Co-Founder/Executive Director, Tech4Dev e) Efe Ukala, Founder, ImapctHER | 3:00 – 4:00pm |
| 2 | Summary of main points – Q&A | 4:00-4:15pm |

Participants

The side event will engage participants from Government (Africa Wide), donor organizations, civil society organizations, Member States, UN entities, DFIs (Multi laterals and Bi laterals), and women-related networks.