WOMEN’S DIGITAL INCLUSION: BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GENDER DIVIDE IN AFRICA

Digital technologies have created new spaces for interaction and enabled new ways to connect, share experiences, work, and build communities. These technologies continue to be influential and have the potential of enhancing growth and expanding opportunities for the realization of women’s rights in Africa.

However, digital divide continues to be a global concern. Generally, digital divide relates to the difference between groups with access to technology and the internet and those without. This can surface in three ways, thus:

- Gender divide, where women are less likely to own a phone or access the internet.
- Social divide, where unequal access to the internet contributes to social division where groups without internet access don’t benefit from ‘global village’ interactions.
- Universal access, divide where individuals with physical disabilities not having access to or the ability to use hardware and software.

Globally, 3.7 billion people do not have access to the internet. Half of them are women who make up 28.4 percent of the workforce engaged in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and only 30 percent on average in sub-Saharan Africa (UN Women, 2022).

Despite the reduction of the digital gender divide in some parts of the world, research indicates that it is widening in Africa. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), in 2013, only 37% of all women were online, compared to 41% of all men. The digital gender divide in Africa has continued to widen since then, with women in developing countries being 14% less likely to own a mobile phone than men and are less likely than men to utilize mobile data, social media applications, or SMS services.

In Uganda, according to a survey conducted in 2015 by the Uganda Communications Commission survey on the usage and active usage of ICT, only 44% of women, owned and could use a phone at any time compared to 62% of the men. Additionally, only 15% of women had used a computer or the internet in the last three months prior to the survey compared to 21% of the men that were interviewed. The digital divide gap was even worsened by the introduction of OTT Tax which makes destitute populations consider internet usage an opportunity cost.

Affordability, low literacy and digital skill levels, safety and security concerns, and lack of family approval are the four key barriers to mobile ownership and mobile internet use for women in low- and middle-income countries according to GSMA.

It is however imperative that the digital divide is addressed since digital technologies contribute towards greater inclusive economic growth and stability through increased employment (through digitally enabled jobs), better literacy, financial inclusion, and participatory governance.
Empowering women through digital technology benefits businesses, economies, and societies since it creates a positive ripple effect across generations. Acceleration of women’s digital inclusion can be achieved through strengthening the implementation of cyberbullying laws—which will harness a safe environment for women,

- Use of inclusive online communication and marketing material,
- Increase rural electrification,
- And providing simple, low-cost options for those who are socially and economically excluded to get online.
ABOUT FINDING XY

Founded in 2017, Finding XY is an innovation center that designs and implements innovative projects that provide access to low-risk capital, capacity development, and markets-based research. Through our enterprise support projects, we want to create communities where there is no poverty, with gender equality and create opportunities for economic growth with decent work by empowering SMEs through innovation. This is achieved through building global partnerships with the goal of mitigating climate change and conserving the environment.

Finding xy established the women in agriculture impact investment (WAII) facility to accelerate investment to agri-smes, across the value chain using a blend of instruments and a gender lens approach. WAII is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the USAID under the Feed the Future Uganda inclusive agricultural markets activity and is implemented by FINDING XY.

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