Committee: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Issue: Bridging the gender digital divide to ensure protection of SDGs

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Vasilena Anaxagorou and I'm a soon to be 17-year-old student attending 12th grade at Arsakeio High School of Ioannina. This would be my first time chairing and I'm truly honoured and delighted to be serving as a Deputy President in the United Nations Development Programme Committee (UNDP) of the 9th Arsakeia-Tositseia Schools Model United Nations Conference (ATSMUN).

First and foremost, it is indubitable that this committee will boost your moral sense, considering that it highly vitalises "the protection of human rights, capacity development and the empowerment of women", as mentioned in the United Nations public website. Secondly, I would like to give you some advice regarding your preparation for the conference. While a substantial amount of work has been put into this study guide, aiming to make the topic as comprehensible for you as possible, I suggest you do your own research as well. You may find further data concerning your delegation that is not included in this guide, or you may gain a deeper understanding of the issue by examining different sources.

To conclude, I'm really eager to hear all your different opinions on the matter and I hope to achieve a fruitful but also amusing debate. If you have any questions with your studying, do not hesitate to contact me at the following e-mail address, it would be a pleasure to assist you! I'm truly looking forward to meeting all of you in November and I wish you the best of luck with your preparation!

Yours sincerely,

Vasilena Anaxagorou

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INTRODUCTION

In today's modern society, Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) play a critical role in achieving gender equality and empowering women. Granting them access to crucial information and involving them as actors in social, economic, and environmental development, all aid in coming closer to a world where both genders share equal rights in all aspects.

Even though women can benefit greatly from technology and the internet, many are unable to use digital tools, especially in comparison to men, due to a lack of opportunity and knowledge, as well as fear of prejudice due to the notion of technology being "for men", which highly discourages them. Furthermore, in developing nations, women have significantly lower technology participation rates than men. Well ingrained socio cultural beliefs regarding the place of women in society, as well as a struggle to afford technology and internet access, result in this frustrating outcome. Girls and young women need equitable access to technology, digital literacy training, and also online safety in order to achieve gender equality.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are to be implemented by the United Nations, governments, and major groups as a comprehensive plan of action on a global, national, and local level in every area where there are environmental problems caused by humans, serve as a road map with the intention of including all parties and requiring gender equality for all of these objectives. ICTs and the gender digital divide have been found to have the greatest influence on the second Sustainable Development Goal (zero hunger), the third (good health and well-being), the fourth (quality education), the fifth (gender equality), the eighth (decent work and economic growth), the ninth (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) and the tenth (reduced inequalities). The empirical findings indicate that these accomplishments are negatively impacted by the gender digital divide and positively impacted by a technology-friendly disposition.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Agenda 21

The International Council's for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction (CIB) Agenda 21 was created to serve as a global bridge between the international agendas, and national or regional agendas for the built environment and construction industry. Its main goals were to define Research and Development (R&D) activities associated with sustainable construction and to develop a worldwide framework and terminology that will be valuable to all national, regional, and sub-sectoral agendas. The agenda document presented a thorough review of the ideas, problems, and challenges involved in sustainable development and sustainable construction, as well as certain difficulties for the building sector.

Gender Digital Divide

The term "digital divide" or "technology gap" refers to the disparity between groups which have access to technology and the internet and those that do not. Therefore, the gender digital divide concerns the distinction between men and women in the field of technology.

Gender Digital Divide Index (GDDI)

The Gender Digital Divide Index (GDDI) is an experimental framework created to monitor each country's progress in bridging the gender digital divide, referring to different income levels and social backgrounds, its research scope representing more than a half of the world's population and total Gross Domestic Product (GDP)[1]. Several key correlations between government initiatives, social transition and international influence have been concluded through this framework.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

The infrastructure and parts that make up modern computing are known as ICT. Although there is not a sole, agreed-upon definition of ICT, the phrase is generally understood to refer to all hardware, software, networking elements, applications, and systems that collectively enable communication between

[1] Trishanova, Ekaterina, et al. *Gender Digital Divide Index Report*. 2022.

individuals and groups such as companies, non-profit organisations, governments, and criminal organisations in the digital sphere.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are 8 goals that UN Member States have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015, derived from the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

Research and Development (R&D)

The term "Research and Development" (R&D) refers to a number of actions that businesses carry out in order to innovate and launch new commodities and services. Often, R&D comprises the first phase of development. To advance their R&D needs and objectives, businesses need expertise, funding, and knowledge. In general, research and development are done to bring new services and products to the market and increase profits for the company.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were enacted by the United Nations in 2015 as a global call to action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee that by the year 2030, peace and prosperity will be experienced by everyone.

Figure 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals.[2]

[2] "Sustainable Development Goals." *University of Crete*, sdgs.uoc.gr. Accessed 8 Aug. 2023.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Link between ICTs and SDGs.

SDG 2 is to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. The incorporation of technological innovation in the domain of agriculture serves to increase yield and feed the entire population (better access to information and, in fact, better decision-making, daily and hourly weather forecasts, more developed tools to promote productivity and efficiency). ICTs contribute to the improvement of food security and the promotion of agricultural sustainability by offering opportunities that benefit farmers, connecting them with remote areas and helping them to improve their farming methods and productivity (better production, market price information, environmental conditions control, food supplies monitoring, delivery efficiency). In this way, it is indicated that smart farming for agriculture makes a tremendous contribution to food sustainability.

SDG 3 is to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. ICTs play an important role in the development of the medical industry. In some hospitals, healthcare research or medical centres, the information is computerized and the tools developed make it possible to identify patients' diseases more effectively and, consequently, propose more suitable medication. As an example, we can see the importance that is playing in technology (research, awareness, and fight) in the case of the appearance of an unknown disease at the present time: the coronavirus. Thanks to technological progress, all countries using ICTs are at the same level of information, including all inhabitants, such as ordinary citizens, medical researchers, or governors. Besides, technology encourages an active and healthy lifestyle and allows monitoring of physical activities to improve the health of those who need exercise such as obese people, and also facilitates clinical intervention.

SDG 4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In terms of education, access to ICTs is, on the one hand, allowing for online training, thereby saving time and money, and on the other, for the use of tools and devices that are more powerful and better adapted

to the learning needs of the current era. It should be noted that this use and access to technology contributes to the fight against various types of exclusions and segregations. The use of ICTs is being a decisive challenge in the world of education, the advances they offer are ideal to facilitate the participation of the different groups of people involved in the educational process.

SDG 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The use and access to ICTs makes a very clear contribution to the fight against gender inequalities. This is because it allows its users access to information and online learning, training and work as an alternative to the issue of work-life balance. Technology also offers women a range of opportunities for empowerment. For this purpose, the UN indicates that countries which seek to direct their science, technology and innovation policies towards sustainable development should also consider giving social problems a central place in their policies. Innovation policies that take into account gender issues can favour the participation of women as innovators or entrepreneurs, and youth-centred policies can also contribute to making technological change more inclusive. However, it is important to note that several inequalities, among them online violence directed at women, constitute an obstacle to the participation of women in public life and have alarming concrete consequences. In fact, the harassment, intimidation and insults on social networks they experience have profound repercussions in the daily life of women and girls.

SDG 8 is to foster sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. The development of innovation-based strategies and ICTs has been established as evidence to promote economic growth and create new jobs, which imposes the necessity for computer knowledge and skills on most jobs. Technology has also brought about many transformations in the way we do business (e-commerce, e-banking, digital marketing, etc.). The population can communicate instantaneously and at a limited cost, and this is thanks to the universalization of the internet, which has empowered the interconnection of different networks creating a collaborative economy. On the other hand, information technologies (IT) allow the creation of conditions for better position of companies in international markets.

SDG 10 is to reduce inequality within and among countries. Despite the different digital divides in existence, ICTs can be a key element in reducing inequalities between regions and countries. A vast interwoven network of reciprocal interests, of open communications for exchange of technology and commercial intelligence and personnel and cultural patterns has been developed.

SDGs and Gender

According to the Sustainable Development Report[3], no country in the world has reached the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and it is assumed that none will by 2030, yet it does reveal in its ranking that certain countries have made more progress than others, in the form of a percentage. Developed countries such as Denmark (85.7%), Sweden (86.0%), and Finland (86.8%) are at the top of the ranking. On the other hand, Chad, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan are at the bottom of these rankings.

Gender equality plays a vital role in the achievement of several of the SDGs since it allows doubling efforts and contributions in all sectors. Women constitute half of the population and incorporating them into development has become critical for all nations, while having them in the top management team means understanding different market realities. It should be clarified that the purpose of including women is not to replace men, but rather to bring significant benefit to a variety of areas.

More precisely, the significance of gender equality in the second SDG is mostly due to rural women's role in maintaining food security and the need to empower them technologically in order to reach this goal. In this regard, it was designated that there are various factors affecting rural women, emphasising the importance of guaranteeing equitable access to commodities and resources such as technology.

Furthermore, the example of rural women in agriculture is not the only one affected by this feature; the role of women may be just as crucial in agricultural family health, which is why the third SDG is also highly concerned with the progress

[3] "Sustainable Development Report." *Www.sustainabledevelopment.report*, www.sustainabledevelopment.report/.

towards a gender equal society. The most prepared women and those with the most developed digital capacities are more able to break through the glass ceiling imposed on them and attain positions with great responsibilities that allow them to contribute to the world.

The fourth goal is supplementary to the fifth, particularly the former's third sub-goal, due to the fact that it strives to "ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university".[4]

Moreover, SDG 5 emphasises the struggle against violence, the generalisation of gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls. This includes not only providing equal learning opportunities for women, but also career prospects and capability-building opportunities that will allow them to pursue leadership roles or encourage entrepreneurship to establish their own businesses on a comparable basis with men, along with combating wage inequalities, which will enable economic growth, as the eighth goal aims to achieve.

As regards the ninth goal, it is closely related to the third. It is only via investments in technological infrastructures and innovative materials that access to and utilisation of online resources and digital devices may become universal, providing value to the economy and facilitating development.

Finally, the tenth goal addresses the general reduction of inequalities, particularly referring to the bridging of gaps, whether of gender or between geographical areas.

[4] "ODS HOME PAGE." *Documents-Dds-Ny.un.org*, 2015, documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/291/89/PDF/N1529189.pdf?OpenElement.

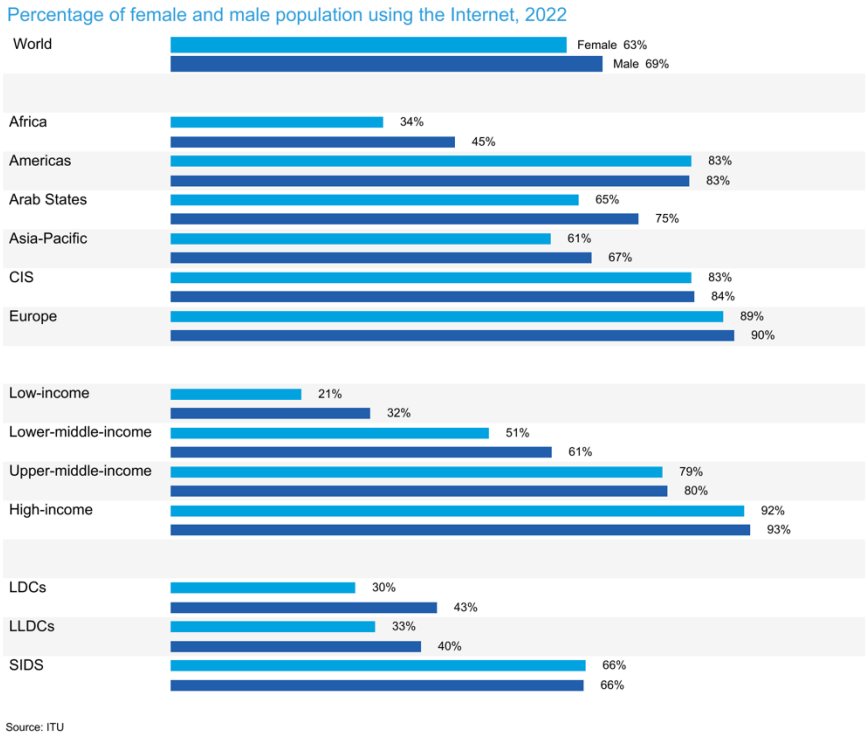

Figure 2: Percentage of female and male population using the Internet, 2022.[5]

The Gender Digital Divide

New analytical feminist perspectives came into view during the 1980s, leading to the emergence of the first studies that connected gender to technologies. Nonetheless, the rise of research on the Gender Digital Divide (GDD) began its journey and development as a result of a fundamental change in the approach for analysing the digital divide in its access and use. This is reasonable provided that, in the early stages of digital divide research, the primary focus was placed on the fact that mere access implied the integration of all sectors of the population, without taking into account the multidimensionality of the concept of digital divides (access, use, and quality), as well as the dependent variables or correlations with other lurking inequalities in our society. The digital divide is enacted in one of two ways: through lack of technical skill and through a physical limitation on access. The term "access" in regard to the digital divide was initially used to refer to whether or not a

[5] "Facts and Figures 2022 - the Gender Digital Divide." Www.itu.int, www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2022/11/24/ff22-the-gender-digital-divide/.

person could connect to the Internet. Access later became a synonym for "use", at which time opportunity and choice were conflated, as studies have since shown that more people have access to the Internet than those who actually use it.

The Gender Digital Divide Index (GDDI) Pilot

The key findings of the GDDI pilot indicates correlation between multiple factors. For instance, GDDI is highly correlated with the provision of government initiatives, as well as being affected by external actors such as the World Bank, responsible for income classification. Good foundations are necessary but not sufficient to overcome gender digital divides. Placing women in key leadership roles in government and businesses is shown to lead to more possible change for the reality of gender inequality that continues off-line.

High income	Upper-middle income	Lower-middle income	Low income
Chile	Brazil	Egypt	Dem. Rep of Congo
Saudi Arabia	China	India	Ethiopia
Singapore	Mexico	Nigeria	Haiti
Sweden	Russia	Ukraine	Tajikistan
United States	South Africa	Vietnam	Uganda

Figure 3: Pilot countries part of the Gender Digital Divide Index.[6]

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Norway

Norway follows policies committed to ensure a sustainable future striving for equality. It is currently one of the few countries with minimal digital gender divide, acknowledging the cultural barrier that pertains to non-western immigrant internet users. It has been consistent with its quality of life and commitment towards achieving SDGs, establishing governmental programs that actively train

[6] Trishanova, Ekaterina, et al. Gender Digital Divide Index Report. 2022.

users to acquire necessary digital skills. It has strived to make technology accessible through affordability proportional to the median income, resulting in the common issue of rural accessibility being much less severe and well mitigated.[7]

Vietnam

Growing gender inequality in Vietnam not only translates onto unbalanced digital access but is even more so reflected upon in Vietnam's efforts to achieve other SDGs closely related with social justice and development. Overall digital literacy rates remain a prominent issue within Vietnam, hindering its efforts to modernise and stabilise. Wealth inequality in the state is a significant contributor to discrepancies between social classes, though there is significant progress made by the country, taking initiative to change misogynistic social narratives and increase investment in women in professional fields.

European Statistical Office (EUROSTAT)

Moderate progress has been shown by EUROSTAT countries towards the SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10, while significant progress was also made towards the goals eight and nine. Such multilateral organisations are often hindered by each member-state's unique circumstances and the issue of coordination across different priorities each country has. Nonetheless, EUROSTAT has been credited with greater investment towards establishing equality between member states in terms of capacity for basic needs.

Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS)

SDGs 2, 3, 4, and 5 have been improved in ASviS countries, while SDGs 8 and 10 have remained broadly stable. ASviS aims to innovate current measures of assessing progress done by each member country in order to achieve the SDGs, include predictive methods for future progress. Such measures take into account multiple factors, including the impact of global events on each country's ability to carry out investments.

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[7] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Royal Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality. Report of the OHCHR on Ways to Bridge the Gender Digital Divide from a Human Rights Perspective - Norway's Answer to Questions. 16 Jan. 2017.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The OECD countries are on average closest to meeting SDGs 1 and 3, while still being far from reaching SDGs 2, 5, and 9. Compared to men, women are closer to SDG targets on all indicators related to health (the third goal) but are further away from goals in many employment-related targets such as labour market participation, youth employment, education or training, ICT skills (the fourth goal), managers' earnings (the eighth goal), and share of researchers (the ninth goal).

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
August 3rd 1832	A petition was made to a British Member of Parliament calling for unmarried women to be given the right to vote.
July 19th 1848	Women's first suffrage conference, the Seneca Falls Convention, called for equal voting rights for women as afforded men.
September 19th 1893	First equal voting rights given to women in New Zealand.
October 14th 1897	The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies is formed in the United Kingdom (UK).
October 10th 1903	The UK Women's Social and Political Union was founded.
November 28th 1918	Equal voting rights were given to women in big European countries following the end of World War I.
June 4th 1919	In the United States, Congress adopted the 19th Amendment to extend voting rights to all citizens of voting age (giving equal voting rights to women, although race could still prove to be a barrier).
December 14th 1928	Women over the age of 21 were given the right to vote in the UK (giving them equal voting rights).
April 29th 1945	Equal voting rights were given to women in France.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The "Easy Steps" Program

The "Easy Steps" program is a digital literacy program for learners with little or no prior computer experience. The program has been implemented in the Philippines and its reach expanded through social media, namely a Filipino Facebook page. This online content has since been translated and implemented in other Asia-Pacific countries. The "Easy Steps" program focuses specifically on instruction for women and includes skill training in running Internet searches, using e-mail and word processors for creating resumes and other documents, and creating spreadsheets to manage business and personal finances. The program facilitates the development of digital literacy skills and, more importantly, allows women to immediately apply these skills in their personal or professional lives.

The "She Will Connect" Program

In 2013, following the release of the "Women and the Web" report, the Intel Electronics Corporation announced the "She Will Connect" program—an attempt to reduce the gender and technical gap around the world. The aim of the program was to expand digital literacy skills to young women in developing countries. The initiative commenced in Africa, where the gender gap is the greatest, with a goal to reach five million women and reduce the gender gap by 50%.

The "Telecentre Women: Digital Literacy Campaign"

Similar to the "She Will Connect" program, the "Telecentre Women: Digital Literacy Campaign" is a global initiative to empower women with knowledge of ICTs for their personal growth. The program has provided digital literacy training to over one million women, which renders the "telecentre woman" more employable, able to contribute more, and an asset to any enterprise.

The "Women's Annex" Foundation

The "Women's Annex" Foundation was established to empower women in Central Asia by increasing access to the Internet and developing women's digital

literacy skills. This foundation has expanded and now includes digital literacy training for women and children in 245 countries and territories so that they can create a sustainable economic model for themselves and their families.

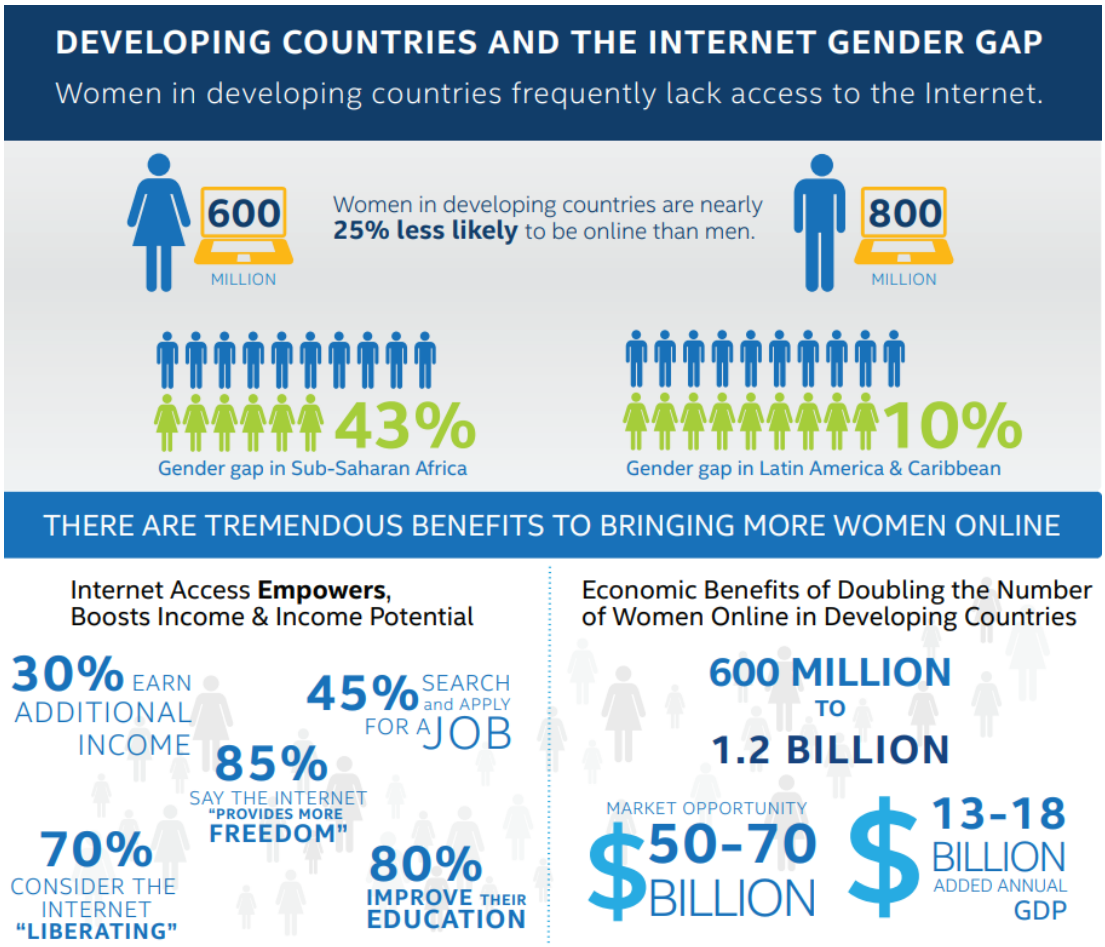

Figure 4: Infographic outlining the impact of women's access to internet.[8]

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Implementing digital skill training programmes for women

This solution has the flexibility to be adapted for specific needs and unique circumstances of different states. It aims to design and apply capacity building programmes for women that include teaching digital skills and individual mentoring that accompanies women through the learning and adoption process on a case by case basis. Restrictions on mobility, for instance, often result in women losing

[8] Intel. *She Will Connect: Connecting Women in Africa to Opportunity through Technology*. 2017.

access to community internet centres and training facilities. Therefore, to combat such restrictions, countries need to build a more resilience support system to empower and engage women.

Establishing women's access to projects specialised in technical skill training

Authorising girls' participation in education programmes such as the Kosovo Digital Economy Project, which trains rural women in programming and web design to become online freelancers can create pathways to economic prosperity both for the individual benefits but also for the country in need of personnel. This could look like governmental subsidies and funding allocated specifically for this cause, as well as increased awareness to developing areas.

Promoting education of women in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) sector

Contribution to the engagement of women in science and technology fields can be achieved through scholarships, internships, and training programs. They offer unique assistance to women who are under-represented and lacking in opportunities. Gender quotas could also be considered for admission into education programs in order to strengthen women's participation in decision making positions and leadership within the domain of STEM.

Ensuring women's safety in the digital world

Making the digital environment safe for women and girls by creating safe spaces such as the "feminist Internet" should be a prioritised solution as it is feasible and impactful. According to the UN's specialised agency for ICTs, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), over 200 million fewer women are online than men and gender gaps in internet use tend to be greater in developing countries. By ensuring basic safety of women in the digital world, fundamental changes could be better initiated and their basic human dignity upheld. Enforcing stricter online anti-harassment policies and working towards eradicating harmful misogynism will contribute to bridging the digital gender divide.

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