



A CALL FOR BOLD, COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO SPARK A GENDER- DIVERSE DIGITAL RESET

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With 2020 marking the 25th anniversary of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, momentum was building to celebrate and more importantly consolidate fragile progress gained in women's rights. We could not have imagined that a global pandemic would put the world into lockdown, producing enormous reversals in the well-being of women while deepening gender inequalities.

25 years ago, only 4 percent of the world's population could benefit from the Internet. Nowadays, approximately half of the world's population is connected and COVID-19 has made digital tools a lifeline for millions of people. However, the pandemic has also exposed the digital divide and shown that the population excluded from the digital world – which includes a majority of women and girls – are the most at risk of being left behind by this crisis.

The year 2021 will be a pivotal point, where public and private partners will need to embrace collective action to improve the state of the world and build a future that will move towards a more equal and inclusive digital transformation. The **Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation** (Action Coalition) builds and reflects this imperative, as an innovative, multi-stakeholder partnership that will mobilize governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector to catalyse action, drive investment and deliver concrete, game-changing results for gender equality.

The challenges faced by women and girls to access, use, influence, and create digital technologies are multi-dimensional. They will require designing transformative actions to remove barriers associated with traditional social norms, lack of education, costs,

trust, safety concerns or geographies, among many others. The Action Coalition aims to drive commitments towards specific tactics that will allow us to accelerate progress toward this change.

Bridge the gender gap in digital access and competence

The current trends show lower access to and utilization of digital tools for women and girls and a lack of diverse skilled workforce in the technology sector, in a world with an ever-increasing demand for qualified professionals. To thrive in a 4th Industrial Revolution shaped by technology, girls and women need equitable access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, digital and transferable skills. This requires engaging with families and enlisting communities to change harmful gender norms, attitudes and mindsets. We need to provide more opportunities for women and girls, especially those in vulnerable situations, who are facing the most barriers to take full advantage of technology. The Action Coalition will explore blended financing instruments to mobilize private, public and philanthropic capital specifically to promising education models that address the combination of 21st century skills and gender gaps.

Invest in feminist technology and innovation

Technological innovations can empower women and girls on multiple fronts. They provide access to platforms that amplify their voices. They help leapfrog traditional structures and enhance women's economic participation. However, very few of these digital tools are developed by women or for women, leaving them no opportunity to influence and shape the design of technology. The Action Coalition aims to catalyse efforts across public and private sector actors to develop inclusive and gender transformative technology. The objective will be to invest in and amplify innovations that provide affordable, accessible, useable and sustainable solutions for women and girls to access new opportunities in a variety of sectors such as health, education, agriculture, climate or financial inclusion.

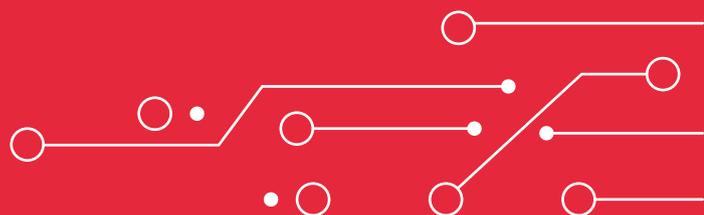
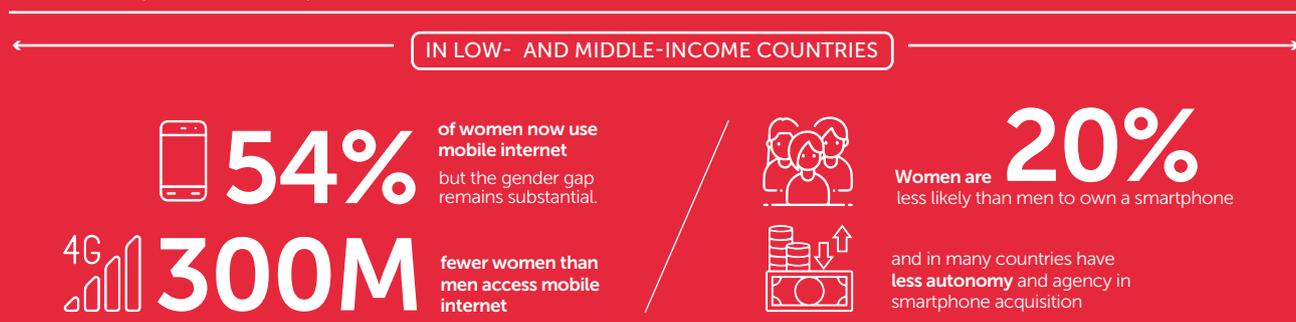


FIGURE 10.

The mobile phone landscape for women⁸⁸



Build inclusive, transformative and accountable innovation ecosystems

Countries and businesses need to build intentional pathways for women and girls' advancement in technology and to lead in changing behaviours and addressing workplace stereotypes. This will require a focus on the human side of the digital transformation and to create new networks that connect talent, investors, academia, government institutions, companies and non-profit organizations. The Action Coalition will pioneer gender-transformative digital innovation hubs, advocate for the adoption of feminist digital policies, and actively promote women's participation in decision-making procedures that shape global digital cooperation.

Prevent and eliminate online and tech-facilitated gender-based violence and discrimination

Women and girls are more likely to be targets of online violence, such as physical threats, sexual harassment, bullying, stalking, sex trolling, and exploitation. As a result, their voices and representation online are

at risk of being marginalized. We need to reset how we develop technology so that everyone equally benefits from platforms, services, and data while maintaining control over their digital lives. Countries and businesses must take responsibility and provide greater transparency and accountability in tackling technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination. This will require new regulations but also innovative user care services, and data analysis of safety and privacy issues faced by women and girls or persons in vulnerable situations.

The current efforts to bridge the gender digital divide cannot afford to stall now. We must be united because moving past the COVID-19 pandemic will require extraordinary collaboration and solidarity – among people, organizations, and countries. A generation of girls will be excluded from the digital world if we fail to seize this unique opportunity. UN Women and the Action Coalition's leadership group stand ready to collaborate with all stakeholders interested to join the coalition - civil society, governments, businesses, and academia - to ensure the international community is mobilised and committed to leverage technology to empower women and make irreversible progress that will help realise gender equality before 2030.

⁸⁸ GSMA, Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020, <https://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap>