WORLD WIDE WEB FOUNDATION

A4AI ALLIANCE FOR AFFORDABLE INTERNET

REACT WITH GENDER-RESPONSIVE ICT POLICY

The Key to Connecting the Next 4 Billion

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CONTENTS

Introduction 3

01 The Digital Gender Gap is Threatening Global Development 4

02 The Path to Universal Access is Gender-Responsive 6

03 How to Design a Gender-Responsive Policy 9

04 Next Steps 13

05 Annex 14

WORLD WIDE WEB FOUNDATION

The Web Foundation was established in 2009 by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web. Our mission is to establish the open web as a public good and a basic right.

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INTRODUCTION

"The ideal Internet is one where women can innovate, exchange ideas, express our sexuality, run our businesses and participate in society on equal terms with our male counterparts."

Fundación Karisma

As the digital revolution forges ahead, world leaders have recognised the critical importance of bringing the billions still offline today into the digital fold. Stemming the tide of growing income inequality and achieving sustainable global development is largely dependent on enabling everyone, everywhere, to benefit from the opportunities afforded by a connection to the digital economy.

The importance of achieving universal, affordable internet access is underscored by its explicit inclusion as a target (9c) in the Sustainable Development Goals. However, this goal will remain unachievable as long as the significant digital gender gap remains. **Indeed, closing the digital divide means closing the gender digital divide.**

This brief examines whether the policy efforts needed to connect women — who are less likely to be connected than men — are being put into place in low- and middle-income countries across the world. It provides the most recent global assessment of national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and broadband policies.

Our research finds that only a handful of governments have taken any action at the policy level, and that even the steps taken in these instances are inadequate to advance true progress toward digital equality. This finding reflects the very limited progress that has been made since previous assessments (most notably those by the Broadband Commission in 2013 and the Web Foundation in 2014) revealed similarly serious shortcomings in advancing women's opportunities for online access and use.

Governments need to take responsibility and act now. This brief outlines concrete steps policymakers should take to ensure that women are offered the same opportunities as men to connect and empower themselves through the internet.

01

THE DIGITAL GENDER GAP IS THREATENING GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Today, less than half the world's population is online and able to participate in the digital world (ITU 2017). Women comprise the majority of the unconnected. Across the globe, over 2 billion women are estimated to be offline, pushing them further to the margins of the global political economy, and leaving men to reap the benefits of connectivity. Web Foundation research from 2015 found women in poor, urban communities to be 50% less likely to use the internet than their male counterparts, and the latest data from the ITU confirms this trend, showing a 12% gap in internet access between men and women.

As Figure 1 shows, this gap is particularly large in Asia (17%) and Africa (25%). Even in Latin America, where the gap in internet use between men and women is relatively small (1%), large differences in women's internet access between countries in the region — compare Bolivia's 13% gender gap in internet use with Jamaica's gap of -14% (meaning that women are more likely to use the internet than men — suggest that the digital gender gap should be a significant concern throughout the region.[1]

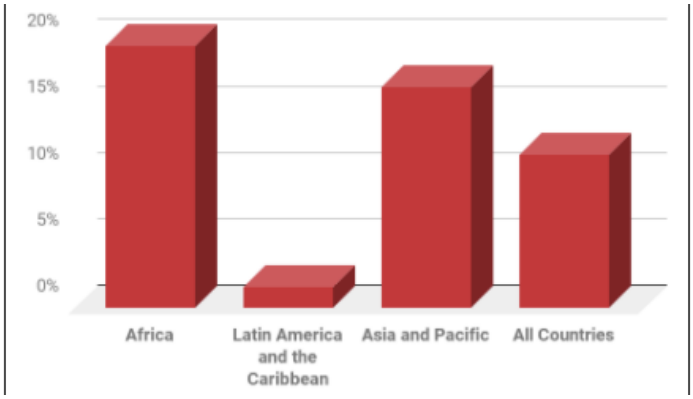
1 See http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2017/Individuals%20using%20the%20Internet%20by%20gender.xls (Accessed Aug 14, 2017).

Women face a number of barriers to online access. While these obstacles vary between regions and countries, the most significant include: (1) limited digital skills and know-how; (2) the high cost of data and internet-enabled devices; and (3) a lack of relevant online content, which contributes to a perceived low-value in using precious resources to connect.

Even where women have access, they are less likely than men to make full use of the opportunities associated with connectivity. The 2015 Web Foundation survey found women to be less likely to use the internet to access information, search for jobs, or engage in civic or political spaces — a reflection of how existing gender inequalities manifest themselves online (Web Foundation 2015). Similarly, a survey of mobile phone internet users in Kenya (where a significant wage gap exists), found that women were more likely than men to purchase smaller and cheaper data bundles, limiting the kinds of activities and the amount of time they can spend online (A4AI 2017).

While the digital gender gap remains large, the good news is that the majority of the obstacles to overcoming this gap can be addressed through smart policy— policy that considers the unique barriers to connectivity faced by women and lays out concrete steps for improving internet access and use. Unfortunately, despite increased lip service to the importance of a gendered approach to ICT policy, policymakers across the globe are failing to take the steps needed to turn these words into action.

Figure 1 - Gender gap in the internet use, average per region (low- and middle-income countries) - 2016

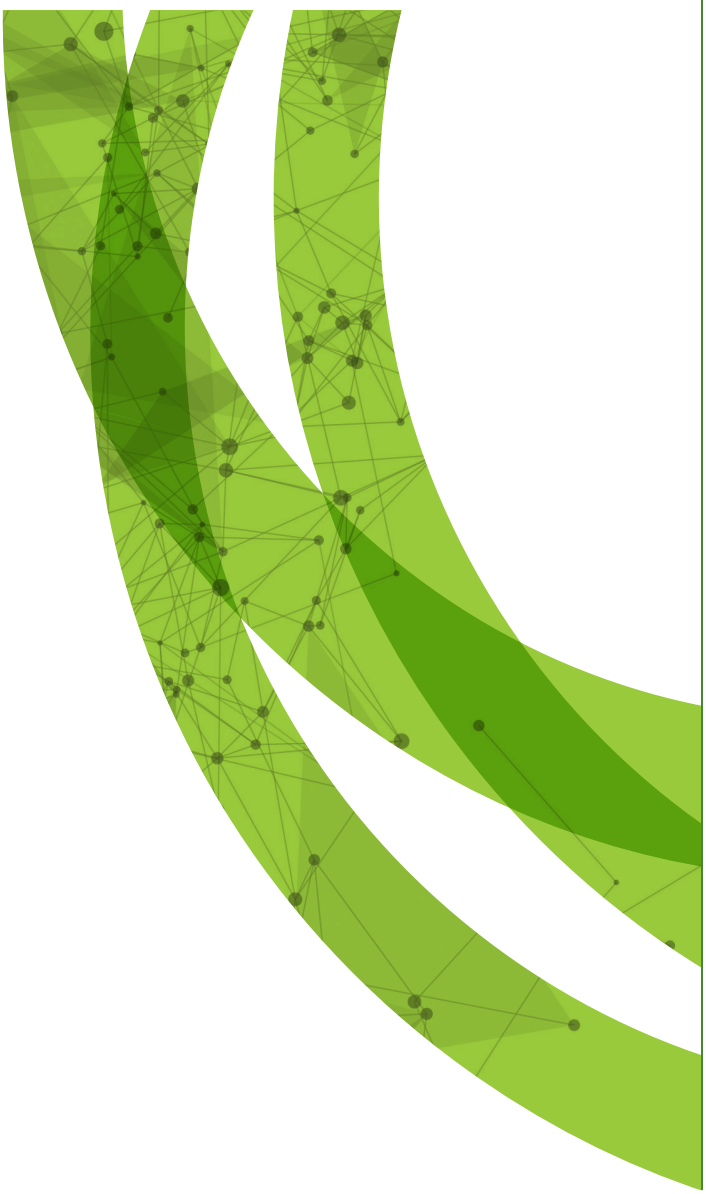


(Source: A4AI calculations based on ITU 2017 data)[2]

2 Note, these figures differ slightly from the regional gender gap in internet use results presented in the ITU's "Facts and Figures 2017" because this paper only looks at the 58 low and middle income countries included A4AI's 2017 Affordability Report, and not all countries covered by the ITU.

02

THE PATH TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS IS GENDER-RESPONSIVE



2.1 Policy to Empower Women Online

The right policy environment is critical to the success of any long-term effort to bridge the gender gap in internet access and use, and, ultimately, to achieving universal, affordable internet access. Countries with an ICT or broadband policy that clearly outlines targets and strategies for increasing internet penetration tend to have higher rates of broadband adoption (World Bank 2016) and lower broadband prices (A4AI 2015). These policies identify investment mechanisms to achieve policy goals, are updated regularly to reflect the evolving policy needs of new technologies, and include measurable, time-bound targets for improving access and reducing prices.

Closing the digital divide means closing the gender digital divide — a feat that will require policies that include all of the aforementioned characteristics, as well as a gender-responsive approach to the development and implementation of the policy.

Gender-responsive broadband planning is not just about making policy for women; rather, it is policy that ensures that all groups have equal opportunities to access and make use of broadband services. The more people that come online, the more a person is able to connect with friends and family, increase business opportunities, organise, and share knowledge and ideas. Thus, gender-responsive broadband policies will also be successful broadband policies.

What is a gender-responsive policy?

A gender-responsive ICT policy is one that equally considers and addresses the connectivity challenges and needs for all groups in society, and takes into particular consideration the unique challenges faced by women when it comes to accessing and using the internet. In so doing, it helps to ensure equal outcomes for women and men.

Developing a truly gender-responsive ICT policy starts with the recognition that technology development and use are both subject to existing socio-economic biases and institutional discrimination. From this base, policymakers can begin to identify the specific challenges and barriers that women and girls face in accessing and using broadband, and can develop the appropriate policy responses to reduce the gap.

2.2 Measuring the Global State of Gender-Responsive ICT Policy

While policymakers increasingly appear to recognise the critical nature of closing the digital gender gap for both national and global development goals, our research shows that countries are falling woefully short when it comes to developing and implementing the gender-responsive policies needed to do so.

A4AI conducted an expert survey of 58 low- and middle-income countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia between June and September 2016 to assess the existence and implementation of policies and regulations that can lower broadband costs and expand access.[1] This survey included a question to assess the extent to which a country's broadband policy was gender-responsive:

To what extent has the government implemented concrete policy goals for gender equity in internet access and use?

Each country was scored on a range from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating the existence of policy designed to encourage increased access, training and use of the internet for women and girls, with concrete, measurable targets for ICT gender equity, and adequate funding dedicated to achieving these targets.[2] Countries with weaker scores were more likely to have limited integration of policies and plans to increase access, with men and boys having greater access, training and use of the internet than women and girls.

On average, countries scored just 2.73 out of 10, indicating very little to no discussion of the digital gender gap and possible responses to address the problem at the policy level.[3]

The lack of attention paid to gender issues in ICT planning and policy is not specific to any one region — countries across all regions are failing to take the steps needed to address growing gaps in women's access to and use of the internet.

Across all 58 countries surveyed, the highest score awarded was a five (out of 10) — and only six countries achieved this score. Each of these six countries has recognised in some form the need to address the digital gender gap at the policy level, or has developed national-level programmes targeted at improving internet access and use for women and girls, but none of them have any measurable targets for improving women's access and use as part of a comprehensive strategy, or national ICT or broadband policy.

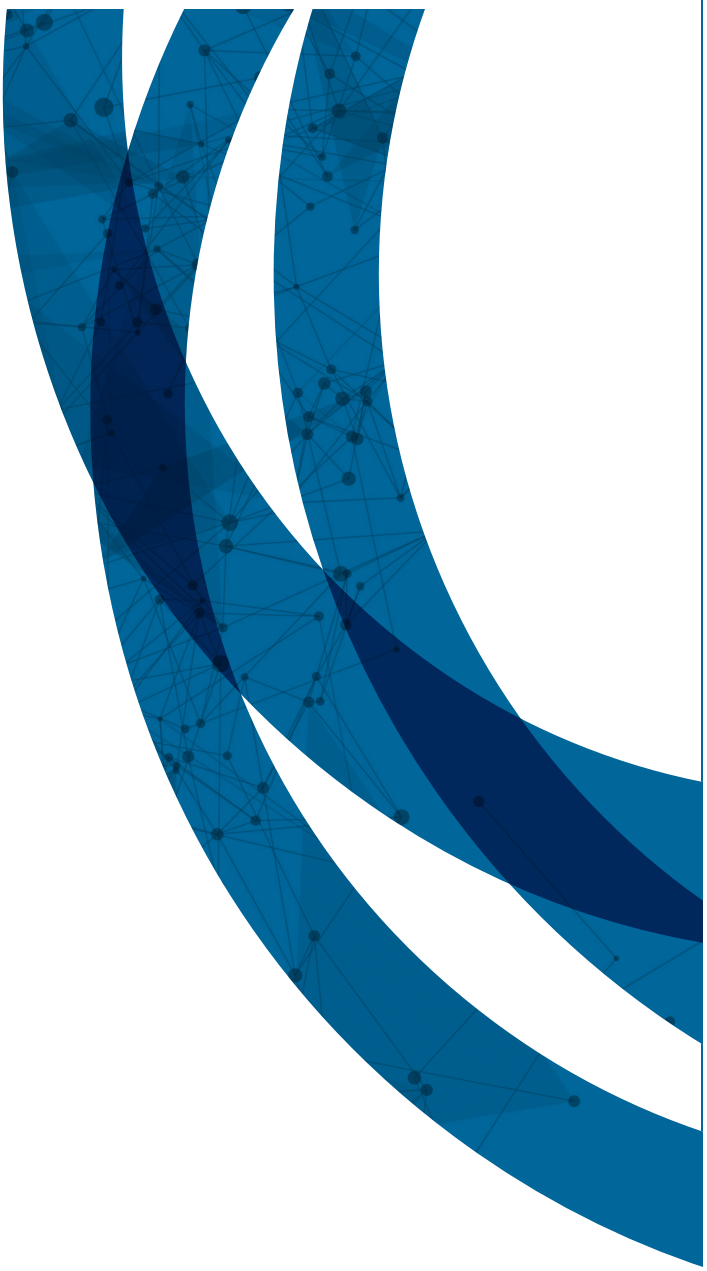
Table 1- Summary of country scores from the A4AI country survey of gender-responsive broadband policies (Source: A4AI, 2016)

Score Level & Qualifications (Score Range: 0-10)	Number of Countries
Policies with gender specific targets for training and access, along with adequate budgetary allocation (score > 5)	0
Some sub-national or national policies encouraging access and training for women; no official targets exist. Some programmes/ projects being implemented at the national level (score 5)	6 (Botswana, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nigeria, Turkey)
While policies do not include targets or plans to improve women's access and training there is evidence of some discussion or action in government; several programmes/projects in place, mostly at sub-national level (score 4)	15
Policies do not include targets or plans to improve women's access and training and there a few examples of discussion or action in government; very few programmes/projects in place, mostly at sub-national level (score 3)	15
Little to no incorporation of gender equity concerns in plans or policies with no evidence of awareness or discussion of the issue in government, no programmes/ projects in place (score < 3)	22
Total	58

1 The survey results are subject to an external peer review process, and an internal review by A4AI. See full methodology here.
2 See Annex for full scoring criteria.
3 This compares unfavourably to all other policy areas (e.g., spectrum management, competition policy, infrastructure sharing, universal access and service funds, etc) assessed in the surveys where countries scored on average 5 out of 10, indicating more concerted levels of activity.

03

HOW TO DESIGN A GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICY



3.1 Policymakers Must R.E.A.C.T.

As these results illustrate, most countries surveyed have woefully inadequate ICT or broadband policies to respond to the connectivity needs of women. Without a specific focus on improving access and use opportunities for women, policies will continue to exclude half their population.

Creating a more accessible and empowering internet for women requires policy that focuses on a number of key areas, easily remembered as R.E.A.C.T: Rights, Education, Access, Content, and Targets. Below, we examine why each policy area is important to closing the digital gender gap and explore what countries are doing to tackle each, in the hope that these might be instructive to policymakers everywhere.

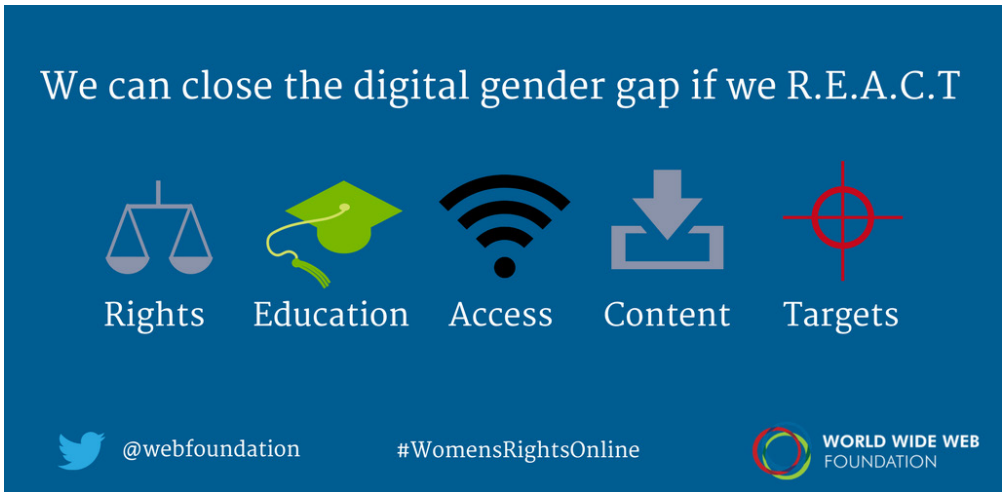
3.2 Rights

Protect and enhance everyone's rights online.

When women are online they face additional challenges that limit their ability to use the internet. Although it varies across countries, women (especially young women) are more likely than men to face harassment and other forms of abuse online (Web Foundation, 2015). Governments need to address this problem if they are to ensure that everyone can benefit from the internet.

In a number of countries, laws to prevent and discourage online abuse exist, but are poorly enforced and may unintentionally have negative impacts on women. Uganda's Computer Misuse Act 2011[1], for example, criminalises cyber harassment, offensive communication, and cyberstalking, but no cases have been prosecuted under these sections. Furthermore, the police and the judiciary do not appear to be trained adequately to understand how the operationalisation of these provisions might benefit women's privacy and safety online. This has implications for access — the Web Foundation's research in Uganda

1 Adapted from Women of Uganda Network (2015) "Women's Rights Online - A research and policy advocacy initiative on women's empowerment through the web - Country Report - Uganda." Unpublished. Washington DC: Web Foundation.



found that women's access to the internet may be limited and controlled by men and, worryingly, that an increasingly hostile online environment is causing women and girls to disengage online, as a result of fear for their safety. Indeed, as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights states, "the gender digital divide is both a consequence and cause of violations of women's human rights."

In Cameroon, a sweeping cybercrime law allows communications to be intercepted, mandates the retention and storage of traffic data, and places obligations on network providers to help intercept and store electronic communications — practices which undermine the privacy of all internet users, including women.[2] In addition to invading the privacy of women online, these laws can also be used to restrict women's freedom of speech online. A female activist in Jamaica, who used social media to identify perpetrators of violence against women, was arrested (and eventually released) for "malicious communication" under the country's Cybercrimes Act — an act originally passed in part to prevent online abuse against women.

It is important for policymakers to recognise the importance of protecting women's rights online and to work to prevent online harassment. It is equally important to avoid legislation and policy that, however well-intentioned, can actually limit women's rights to freedom of expression and privacy online, as well as their ability to use the internet as they wish.

3.3 Education

Use education to equip everyone – especially women – with the skills they need to access and use the web effectively.

Increasing skills training and education is another path toward reducing the digital divide and improving the ability of women and girls to make use of the internet. In many countries, men are more likely to possess the relevant skills to make effective use of the internet. Policymakers need to ensure that adequate programmes are in place to address the digital skills gap, paying particular attention to the needs of women and girls at all educational levels.

Nigeria is one country that has taken steps to improve women's digital skills. The country's National Broadband Plan[3] requires the Federal Ministry of Communications Technology to monitor the number of women without access to the internet, and to provide incentives for private educational centres and civil society organisations to train more women to use the internet. As a result, the Ministry has partnered with a number of private groups to develop ICT capacity building initiatives for Nigerian women and girls.

However, these programmes tend to reach women and girls who already have access; expanding these programmes to those who are not yet online would increase their impact. More importantly, these initiatives are not part of a government-wide policy for gender inclusion and ICTs, but are undertaken in an ad hoc manner, or where supported by donor agencies. These efforts can therefore be improved by a policy that comprehensively addresses the need for skills training among women and girls in different age groups (with adequate budget allocation), with incentives to promote public-private partnerships, and clear measurable targets.

2 From Internet Sans Frontiers (2015) "Women's Rights Online - A research and policy advocacy initiative on women's empowerment through the web - Country Report - Cameroon." Paris: Internet Sans Frontières. Pg. 20.

3 Adapted from Paradigm Initiative Nigeria (2016) "Women's Rights Online - A research and policy advocacy initiative on women's empowerment through the web - Country Report - Nigeria." Unpublished. Washington DC: Web Foundation.

3.4 Access

Deliver affordable access to an open web.

One of the main obstacles to increasing women's access is the high cost of getting online. As reported in the 2015-16 Affordability Report, analysis of sex-disaggregated income data from ten countries in Latin America and the Caribbean found that the relative cost to connect was higher for female-headed households (and highest for single parent female headed households) — perhaps not surprising given the gender wage gap around the world.

Costa Rica's Fondo Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (the country's Universal Service and Access Fund) runs a programme that indirectly addresses this problem. The Connected Homes Programme (Hogares Conectados) provides a subsidy to low-income households to purchase fixed internet service and a computer, and approximately 95% of the households that qualify for a subsidy under this programme are headed by women. As a result, the initiative has been recognised internationally as a way to support access for women and low-income groups.

Extending this initiative to promote access to mobile broadband services and other forms of access will help to strengthen its effects and enable connectivity for even more people. Similar programmes that target low-income groups (who are often disproportionately women) or women themselves can help redress the gender digital gap in many countries.

3.5 Content

Ensure relevant and empowering content for women is available and used.

In addition to expanding access opportunities, governments also need to ensure that relevant content is available in local languages and is being created locally. Doing so will ensure the internet is relevant and useful for local communities, and will increase the incentive for people to spend money and resources on connecting.

In Kenya[4], the ICT Authority is collaborating with organisations and individuals to make local data that is relevant to citizens (e.g., information and datasets regarding health and agricultural practices) available via a government website (opendata.go.ke). Though a laudable initiative, the data currently provided does not sufficiently address issues affecting women, including information on reproductive health, AIDS, antenatal and postnatal care, violence against women, and women's legal rights (e.g., information on voting, land ownership, marriage, divorce and child custody).

Programmes designed to encourage the participation of women and girls in the digital economy and, specifically, to encourage them to become content creators, are generally run through private initiatives. Separately, a number of civil society organisations (e.g., the Federation of Women Lawyers, the Federation of Women Educationists, and Cradle) are active in providing online information about women's rights; most information on women's health, including reproductive health and sexual health rights and services, is provided by private individuals on Facebook or blogs.

3.6 Targets

Keeping policymakers accountable.

For any policy to be successful it must be guided by measurable and time-bound targets. Measurable implies that the data collection required to support policy analysis can be done feasibly and on a regular basis; where necessary, it should be supported with adequate resources. Time-bound implies that both end-goals and intermediate targets are linked to specific dates (e.g., achieve 80% internet use among all adult women in 5 years). Having such targets means that all key stakeholders — including ministries, the regulator, mobile network operators and other internet service providers, and civil society — have a clear understanding of the policy's goals, and can work to support the realisation of these objectives.

Unfortunately, such targets were absent from all policies reviewed for this report. While some countries recognised the importance of general time-bound targets for broadband policies, and included goals on increasing penetration over a specific number of years, none included targets for women or girls. Having these targets will provide governments a way to monitor progress made toward closing the digital gender gap and, ultimately, the global digital divide.

4 Adapted from International Association of Women in Radio & Television (2015) "Women's Rights Online - A research and policy advocacy initiative on women's empowerment through the web - Country Report - Kenya." Unpublished. Washington DC: Web Foundation.

04

NEXT STEPS

No country will achieve universal access without overcoming the digital gender gap.

4.1 Overcoming the Policy Barrier to Universal Access

The existence of the gender digital gap is fundamentally a result of policy failure. While a few countries have taken some steps in their policies to address the gap in access and use, these are insufficient and much work remains to be done by all the countries surveyed.

In addition to developing policies that focus on rights, education, access, content, and targets, as outlined above, it is critical that women are included in the actual policymaking process. Policy designed for all citizens — and particularly policy focused on affecting women — should be designed with women, and we must work to secure women's participation in the policymaking process.

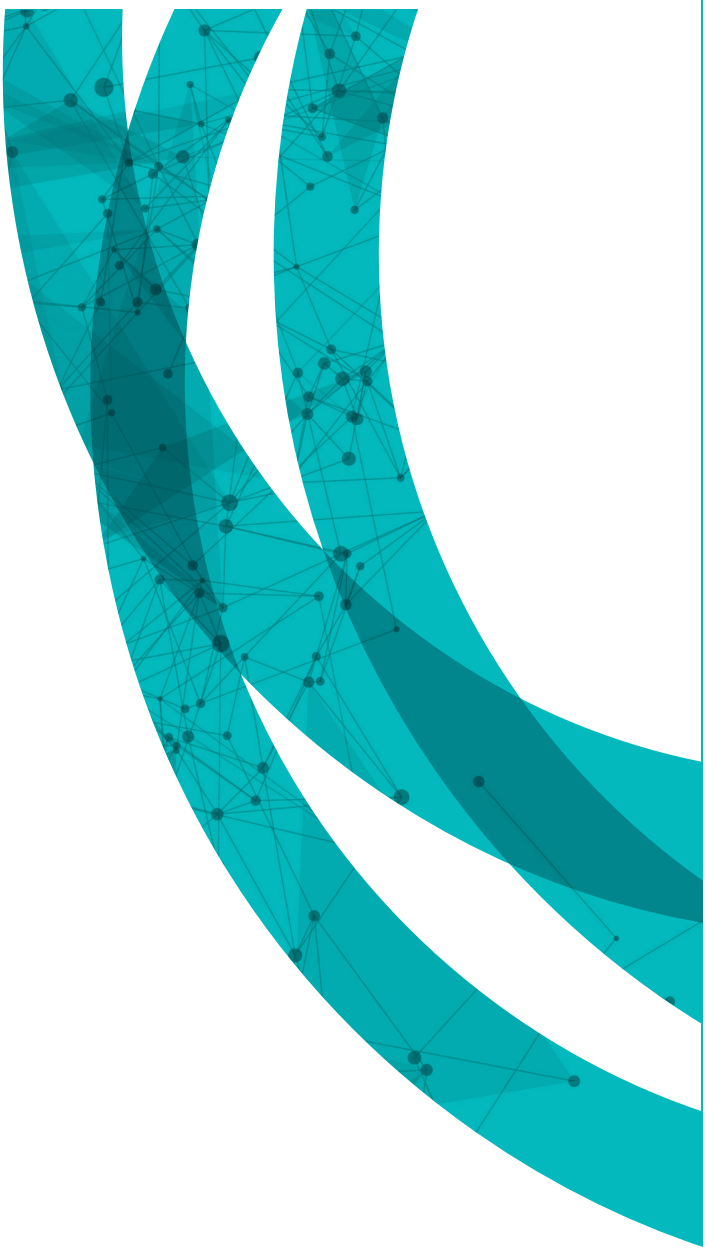
In many countries, women's organisations have made significant contributions to incorporating gender perspectives in policy across various sectors such as health, education, and the environment. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many other countries, where women's voices are left entirely out of the policymaking process.

As with all policy development, it is important that the government and its partners ensure that supporting analysis integrate gender considerations, from network deployment analysis to universal access strategies and priorities. Another strategy is to establish quotas to ensure the equal participation of women and other marginalised groups in all programmes supported by national policies and plans, especially rural and poor populations.

Better broadband policies offer a clear path to improving women's internet access and use, and to moving forward toward universal access goals. In this brief, we have outlined steps that can be taken to make policies more gender-responsive. It is now time for governments to take responsibility and immediate action to maximise the benefits of the internet and emerging technologies for all people.

05

ANNEX



Expert Survey Question and Scoring Guide

To what extent has the government implemented concrete policy goals for gender equity in internet access and use?

Scoring Criteria

10	5	0
There is an official national policy or directive designed to encourage increased access, training and use of the internet for women and girls, with concrete targets for gender equity in this area. Specific and adequate resources and programmes are allocated and identified for that purpose and the programme is being clearly implemented, with evidence of success in some areas where the initiative is being implemented.	There may be sub-national and/or national policies encouraging increased access, training and use of the internet by women and girls, but no official national concrete targets exist. In the absence of a national target, there may be public recognition from a senior government figure (e.g. Cabinet minister) and/or parliamentarians encouraging greater female access to the internet.	There is very little, if any, discussion at any level of government about the need to encourage greater access to and use of the Internet by women and girls, or of increased training in how to use the internet for women and girls. There are no related concrete policy targets and budget allocations at all.

Scoring and evidence thresholds:

For a score of above 0 to be awarded: there should be evidence of a commitment in government policies or plans to increase access, training and use of internet to women and girls aiming at gender equity in this field, with concrete targets set in such plans.

For a score of above 3 to be awarded: there should be evidence that this is only being implemented in a few pilots and is not yet widespread. Men and boys still have far greater access, training and use of the internet than women and girls reaching 10% of the target groups.

For a score of above 5 to be awarded: there should be evidence that implementation is becoming more widespread and budget allocation has been made to enable scale-up to reach the majority of women and girls across the country.

For a score above 8 to be awarded: there should be evidence of widespread implementation and almost equal access, training and use of the internet by women and girls reaching 50% and above of the target groups, with evidence of success.

Scoring Guidance

For many countries a large gender digital divide exists; see for example recent research by the Web Foundation which shows that poor women in urban areas in ten developing countries are 50% less likely to be connected to the internet than men in the same age group, with similar levels of education and household income. If broadband plans are to improve internet affordability and access within a country they will also have to address such gender based divides where they exist. The purpose of this question is to assess the extent to which a country's broadband policies address this problem and take concrete actions to close the gender gap.

Please note the following:

- A qualifying initiative or directive is a plan by the government to support increased access, training and use of the internet and related ICTs for women and girls.
- For the purpose of this indicator, researchers are asked to focus on whether a directive exists and its degree of implementation.
- Access does not equal use - the official directive need to emphasise both (and may therefore include references to training, for example). Thus, even for those few countries where access between males and females is fairly equal it is still important to address this question as internet use and impact between these groups may not be the same.

Source Guidance

- Government plans and/or directives, most likely prepared by the Ministry of Communications;
- Government budgets;
- Speeches by government leaders;
- Review of government plans / schemes on training incentives for women and girls on the use of web and related technologies;
- Interviews with gender and/or technology policy specialists in the government;
- Interviews with members of civil society organizations dedicated to gender issues or gender and technology issues;
- Reports published by the media, academic and policy journals, and development and multilateral bodies (e.g., World Bank, IFC, OECD, African Development Bank).

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