

UN@75 Joint celebration: Women and young girls in ICT

Concept Note

1. Background

The year 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and, in celebration of this milestone, the UN launched a global dialogue to reach as many people as possible, especially young people, listening to their hopes and fears; learning from their experiences; and empowering them to think and act globally.

For Africa, this anniversary provides an opportunity to discuss how Internet Communication Technology (ICT) is key to women's empowerment; the sustenance of a healthy job market; and is vital to the economic growth of Africa. Several studies have shown that Africa remains the most dynamic continent in terms of information and communication technologies, with rapidly evolving penetration rates and extraordinary innovations. However, the gender gap on access and use of digital technologies has been growing with only 22.6% of women using the Internet compared to 33.8% of men as at the end of 2019. Barriers contributing to the gap on the continent include unaffordable access, threats to access and use, low digital literacy and confidence, and the lack of relevant content, applications and services. This disparity in access has the potential to exacerbate the already high levels of social and economic inequalities, affect the social mobility of people and derail the potential of innovation and economic growth. Indeed, eighty percent of the women in Africa live in the rural areas where they have less access to such basic needs as health care, education and other public facilities or services. Working women on the continent are engaged in unpaid care work, lack access to decent work or are paid lower wages.

Addressing this gender gap can create significant business opportunities for the continent. It is estimated that closing this gender gap just in mobile ownership and data usage in low- and middle-income countries could generate an annual USD \$15 billion in revenue for mobile operators. In this regard, a number of continental initiatives have been launched to increase the number of women and girls who are participating in the fourth industrial revolution in support of Africa's growth efforts. Some examples are highlighted below.

Miss Geek Africa is an entrepreneurship competition that originated as Miss Geek Rwanda in 2014, but was renamed Miss Geek Africa in 2017 and has expanded to 22 countries in Africa. Girls and women between the ages of 13 and 25 submit apps that solve problems through technological innovations. The top three competitors receive cash prizes and business training, and the winner also receives financial backing.

The African Girls Can Code Initiative (AGCCI) of the ITU, the African Union Commission (AUC) and UN Women is a four-year programme designed to train young girls to become programmers and ICT creators, and encourage further education and careers in technology. Launched in 2018, the AGCCI holds several camps throughout the year across Africa. AGCCI 2018-21 identifies two areas that are critical to achieving the desired objective for girls and women's empowerment and development:

- **Bridging the technological divide** by providing tangible programmes to increase women's access to modern technology.
- **Empowerment through access to Education and Employment** providing young girls and women with pathways to contribute and participate in material ways to Africa's innovation, industrialization and growth by mastering ICT.

AGCCI is being implemented by ITU in collaboration with UN Women and the African Union Commission and is designed to **expose and equip young girls with digital literacy, CODING and personal development skills.**

ECA has launched an initiative called "Africa Science Technology and Innovation Forum", part of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD, which aims among others, to build capacity among young people of our continent, by bringing them together in the format of bootcamps to introduce them to opportunities for design and innovation, and to harness the entrepreneurial opportunities associated with digitalisation. The bootcamp is organized through a major online platform, for promoting innovation and instilling entrepreneurial competencies and imparting technical skills that may not be taught at colleges and universities in Africa (e.g. coding mobile devices, rapid prototyping with 3D Printing etc). Students will work in teams to address common challenges, attend classes and access mentors and coaches.

ECA has established a Centre of Excellence on Digital ID, Digital Trade and Digital Economy to support member countries to fully harness the digital potential, and to exploit the benefits of digitalization for the continent's development.

It is within these frameworks that UNECA and ITU are planning a joint event where women in tech will be celebrated under the auspices of the UN@75 celebrations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. UNECA in collaboration with ITU will run a hybrid camp that will bring 124 girls from Addis Ababa and over 3000 girls across the continent joining online for a period of two weeks. The camp will take place at the UNECA Conference Hall One with 124 girls physically present and the rest of the girls joining online

2. Objectives

This Hybrid camp is being organized in celebrations of the UN @75 series of events. This competition dedicated exclusively to women and girls aims to inspire women and young girls in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and to help meet the challenges of the continent, using technology. Several workshops will be held in areas such as Robotics and Internet of Things, Artificial intelligence, Design Thinking, Gaming, Fashion, Animation, Gender empowerment, SDGs and Human Rights

The specific objective of this competition are to:

- Empower women and young girls through the emergence of a sustainable inclusive entrepreneurship to harness digital technology to accelerate implementation of the SDGs in line with the Declaration on the Decade of Action and Delivery on Sustainable Development
- Bridge the gender digital gap by promoting women and young girls' access to digital channels
- Show women and young girls' capacity for innovation to leverage ICT to ensure equitable and quality lifelong opportunities
- Develop an action plans to follow-up on outcomes of the event and reinforce partnerships among the 2 institutions

3. Structure of the Event

It has been discussed that the celebration event for UN@75 should be a hybrid one that will include some of the Alumni of AGCCI resident in Addis and also others in the Africa Continent.

The Event looks at organizing an International camp in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at which girls from all over the continent will participate virtually together with girls from Addis Ababa who will be physically present in UNECA. In the said camp the girls will be trained to code using the Scratch program and they will also be exposed to interactions that espouse gender equality, mainstreaming and techniques in confidence building and public speaking. The Girls will then form themselves into Groups that will work on solving a community challenge and exhibiting solutions at an Innovation Fair at the end of the Event which combines their technical skills with a Miss/Group Geek competition. There will be a panel of judges and prizes to be awarded.

4. Outcomes:

The successful implementation of this initiative and its completion is a direct contribution to the policy recommendations stipulated within the continental Digital Transformation Strategy that had been endorsed for implementation by the AU heads of States summit in February 2020. The strategy has crafted digital skills and literacy as well as the gender aspect of the digital divide as a

core area that seeks extensive intervention. As a result, the expected outcomes from participation in the camps are:

- Expose young African girls to digital literacy skills.
- Expose girls to CODING and programming.
- Promote and support the young girls' entry into the sector of ICT and CODING.
- Encourage leadership and confidence in young African girls.
- Showcase innovations and projects done by these young innovators.
- Create national attention on girls, ICT and CODING through media under the UN@75
- Have fun and celebrate the UN
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5. Expected Outputs

Expected outputs are:

- Increased engagement and capacity of young girls and women to accelerate implementation of the SDGs in in line with the Declaration on the Decade of Action and Delivery on Sustainable Development
- A Hybrid camp held in celebration of UN@75 as a collaborative event between UNECA, ITU, UN Women, AUC and other interested UN agencies.
- Access to Girls for interviews for media campaigns under the UN@75 celebrations
- Action plan between ECA and ITU to strengthen capacity of young girls and women for accelerated actions to meet the SDGs developed.

6. Participants

The competition is open to the Girls from the African Girls Can Code Initiative of the ITU, UN Women and AUC women and young girls between 13-20 years old across Africa and other age groups of women who have shown an interest in ICTs including those in innovation hubs.

7. Winners

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Winners will be selected based upon the application functionality, innovation, accessibility, commercial potential and overall impact for the Africa region. The winning projects will be presented during the awarding ceremony.

8. Date and Venue:

The event will be held from 30th November to 11th December 2020. The venue will be at the UNECA Hall 1 which has enough space for social distancing guidelines to be adhered to while connected to other participating girls from the Africa Continent virtually.

Annex Event Needs: (To be discussed at the next meeting)

- 1) Team of trainers
- 2) Laptops for Girls to use for Coding
- 3) Internet Access
- 4) Some hardware for some of the Coding
- 5) Tea breaks and Lunches and transport allowance for commuting girls
- 6) Prizes for winners
- 7) Tee Shirts for all participating girls
- 8) Printing of certificates & binding

Annex II : Provisional Annotated Programme