



**PLACING WOMEN AND  
GIRLS AT THE CENTER**

### Shifting from “digital by default” to “inclusion by design”

In September 2022, UN DESA released the *UN E-Government Survey*, which revealed that countries with higher e-government capacity tend to have greater gender equality. However, the survey found that there are relatively few countries offering online services of particular benefit to women. For example, only 45 out of 193 countries surveyed allow users to apply online for maternal or new born child benefits. The report also found a persistent gender digital gap, with women being 30 to 50 per cent less likely than men to use the Internet to participate in public life while also being less likely to own a smartphone. This impacts women’s online representation, access, perspectives and knowledge creation. It may also result in the unintentional exclusion of women and girls from public services, with women less visible in datasets, algorithms, and the machine learning that takes place in the digital transformation of the public sector. The report recommends that leaving no one behind becomes the operational principle guiding policy development and digital transformation. At the policy and regulatory level, Governments should adopt “inclusion by design” or “inclusion first” strategies in the delivery of public services, rather than “digital by default” strategies common in some countries.

The same survey has also shown that while digital development is accelerating in both developed and developing countries, the path to digital inclusion and sustainable development remains fraught, especially in Africa and among countries in special situations. Progress in bridging the digital divide through e-government development varies by

regions. In Africa, only 4 of the region’s 54 countries (South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles and Tunisia) have E-Government Development Index (EGDI) values above the world average, and the very high EGDI group includes no African countries. However, there are positive signs of digital progress in the region, reflected in the movement of Côte d’Ivoire, Zambia and Rwanda from the middle to the high EGDI group and the significant improvement in EGDI values for Guinea, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Algeria and Benin between 2020 and 2022.

### Strengthening capacity of women entrepreneurs to accelerate SDG progress

UN DESA launched a series of demand-driven, capacity-building initiatives supporting women entrepreneurs together with Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and Small and Medium Enterprise Development and the UN Country Team in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, as in many developing countries, women-owned micro and small enterprises are driving forces supporting livelihoods of the working poor and groups in vulnerable situations. Nonetheless, with limited entrepreneurship and management skills, women entrepreneurs, especially those in the informal sector, have been confronting challenges underlining their resilience towards economic shocks and uncertainties.

The National Capacity Building Workshop on Strengthening Entrepreneurship for Accelerating Progress towards SDGs in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, drew together 65 women and youth entrepreneurs from four provinces. It provided business

management skills and digitized solutions to seize online market opportunities. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the workshop and the Ministry has requested UN DESA to replicate the workshop to strengthen capacities of more women entrepreneurs of the country.

### Meeting the changing needs for family planning: Contraceptive use by age and method

Contraception assists individuals and couples to achieve their reproductive goals and enables them to exercise the right to have children by choice. To support policy makers in understanding the latest trends and patterns in contraceptive use and needs, UN DESA launched the *World Family Planning 2022 report* in January 2023. Examining the trends and patterns at the global, regional, and national levels between 1990 and 2021, the report revealed that there are sub-populations of women, in particular young women whose needs for family planning are not being met to the same degree as others. The Department recommended that the needs of these groups be addressed to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information, and education (SDG target 3.7), and to ensure that no one is left behind.

### Empowering women as leaders in public institutions

In 2022, UN DESA continued to collaborate with UNDP, UN Women and the UN Regional Commissions in Africa and Asia and the Pacific to address persistent gender inequality and the below-parity representation of women in positions of power

and decision-making in both regions. With the aim of increasing the presence and leadership of women in public institutions at national and subnational levels, UN DESA commissioned global reviews of laws, organizational policies and good practices. The reviews identified an analytical framework hinging on gender equality as a foundation for achieving all SDGs and women’s equal participation and leadership as essential for an inclusive, responsive and accountable public sector. Using the analytical framework as a benchmark, UN DESA, in collaboration with UN country teams, supported self-assessments of norms and practices promoting gender equality within public administration in the project countries. In partnership with UNDP, UN DESA also developed capacity-building modules to address the gaps identified in the national reviews. Based on these modules, UN DESA has organized capacity-building activities to support the development of an action plan that prioritizes gender equality and promotes women’s career progression towards leadership positions in the public sector in each project country.