

## Equity 2030: Building an Equitable Future for All

### *Rising to the 2030 Agenda and Our Common Agenda by closing the gender equity<sup>1</sup> gap in technology, data, and financing solutions*

In November 2022, the world’s population reached 8 billion, presenting the international community with a unique window of opportunity to empower women and girls and create a world of equal opportunities. There is still much work to be done to ensure all 8 billion people on the planet can exercise their rights and choices and realize their full potential.

While the exponential growth of digital technologies continues, this growth is not equitable, and consequently, neither are the benefits of the digital revolution.

Currently, there is a significant gap in gender-inclusive digital innovation, which can be attributed to, among other things, a lack of women’s inclusion in various stages of the design and development of digital solutions, as well as inadequate investment in research and innovation in women-centric digital solutions. A large body of evidence suggests that design in technology is often “male-centric” by “default”<sup>2</sup>.

Reports show that women-centric technology companies receive only 3% of all digital health funding<sup>3</sup>. A study from 2018 showed that only 20% of healthcare venture capitalists had ever funded a women’s healthcare company<sup>4</sup>. Gender bias in the adoption of customer technology results in overlooking the barriers faced by women in the adoption of technology, including geographical and cultural limitations. The lack of women’s inclusion in training algorithm decisions leads to erroneously amplifying male data, rendering women statistically invisible. In healthcare, gender-biased technology can lead to delayed or incorrect diagnosis and treatment.

Furthermore, gender inequity in the design of digital solutions makes many virtual spaces unsafe for women and girls. The alarming prevalence of online violence against women further deprives them of the ability to safely participate and maintain a digital presence.

Digital solutions can be the great equalizer to disrupt inequality. Yet, progress cannot be achieved without gender-equitable and women-centric solutions. Women and girls are not a niche – they represent half of the world's population. To be gender-inclusive, digital technologies and solutions must address their needs.

The Global Digital Compact can set the principles for designing gender-transformative digital solutions and establish the normative approach for digital development that ensures equitable access and utilization.

---

<sup>1</sup>Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women’s historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. (<https://www.unfpa.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-gender-equality>)

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (Abrams Press, New York, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> Gambon, Stotz & Sandhu “Femtech is expansive—it’s time to start treating it as such”, Rockhealth, 3.8.2020.

<sup>4</sup> Frost & Sullivan “Femtech: Time for a Digital Revolution in the Women’s Health Market”, 31.1.2018.

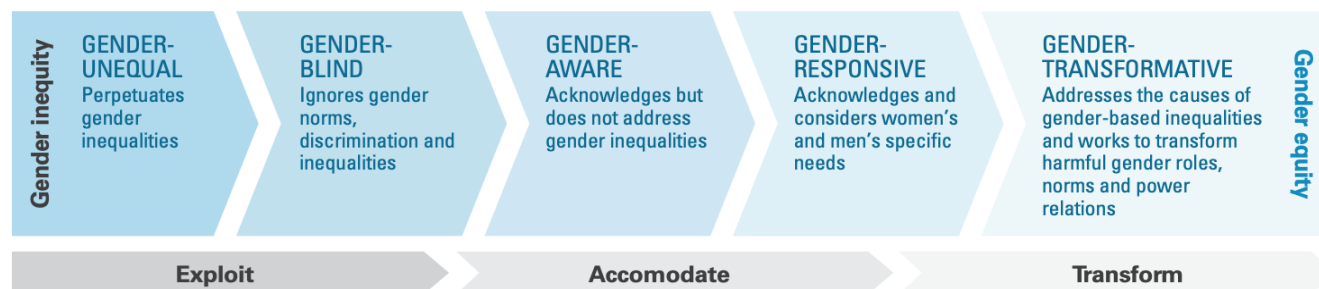
The development of technological solutions and policymaking should:

- Integrate **gender equity in design** at all stages;
- Incorporate **gender equity in data**, including while developing algorithms, training data sets, establishing data security, and in the adoption of customer technologies;
- Secure **equitable financing** to design, develop and produce women-centric digital solutions, including in the area of wellbeing, healthcare and education.

Building on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the UN Secretary General’s “Our Common Agenda” and “Roadmap for Digital Cooperation”, we note the following core principles and actions that should be taken to allow us to collectively achieve gender equity in digital technologies:

### 1. Ensuring gender equity in the design of all digital solutions at all stages.

Gender-inclusive design is an essential step towards gender equity. The Global Digital Compact should promote a gender-transformative approach<sup>5</sup> in the design of digital solutions as part of a continuum towards gender equity. This would include promoting policies and regulations that ensure gender-inclusive technologies through gender parity in data sets, customer technology adoption, algorithm decisions, as well as data training and security – all following the *Do No Harm* principle.



Including women in user testing and explicitly identifying their concerns, including for safety, is an essential part of gender equity in design. As such, the recognition and integration of technology-facilitated gender-based violence prevention and protection tools is critical.

It is also important to eliminate gender bias in machine-readable data sets that result, for example, in unequal labeling of men and women’s images, and differential outcomes. Securing a diverse, gender-inclusive group of end-users from different contexts is critical to ensuring an applicable and contextual solution.

At the same time, a global alliance of key actors is required to ensure that digital technology is not only gender equitable, but that through gender equity in design, digital solutions are making tangible progress in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

<sup>5</sup>Technical note on gender-transformative approaches to the Global Programme to End Child Marriage Phase II: a summary for practitioners (UNICEF & UNFPA publication, 2020). Picture adapted, with permission, from: Pederson, A., Greaves, L., and Poole, N. 'Gender-transformative health promotion for women – a framework for action', Health Promotion International, vol. 30, no. 1, March 2015.

## **2. Close the gap in data on gender-equity in digital solutions and women-centric digital solutions.**

The Global Digital Compact should promote and facilitate the process whereby all relevant actors have metrics and mechanisms to identify, record and report disaggregated data on gender equity in digital solutions design, as well as on women-centric digital solutions and relevant investments.

Diversity, equity and fairness have not always been prioritized in digital solutions, and the evidence base available is limited.<sup>6</sup> Data revealing the existence of inequalities can be used to further galvanize action towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Currently, data on digital solutions addressing the inclusion of women in data sets and women-centric solutions is so marginal and of such poor quality that it perpetuates a cycle of insufficient evidence, exacerbating existing biases.

Quality data is needed to track and monitor progress, and ensure that agreed upon objectives are met. Where data does not exist, it must be created by collective inputs from all stakeholders, with careful consideration made to the possible limitations and biases of data sets. Building a solid foundation of evidence is a complex process requiring multiple studies and the engagement of a wide range of population groups.<sup>5</sup>

Data collection should be anchored in safe and ethical principles, including instances where personal data may be mined for malicious actions through, for example, digital solutions on Internet of Things.

Human rights-based approaches are central to ensure that efforts are made to address the gap on gender-equity in digital solutions and women-centric design solutions.

## **3. Facilitate investment across all digital solution processes and value chains**

The Global Digital Compact endeavors to accelerate the shift in investment distribution towards gender-inclusive and women-focused digital solutions, and away from gender-biased digital solutions, including so-called “gender neutral” digital solutions that receive disproportionately larger investments.

Current investments in women-centric solutions and technology companies developing such solutions are meager. Data on investments in gender-inclusive digital solutions are hard to identify due to a lack of reporting and available metrics.

The scarcity of investment in gender-equitable digital solutions is a self-reinforcing circle. Global inequity in the health sector leads to significant financial losses, and is greatly affected by non-medical drivers.<sup>7</sup> Representative data sets are among the powerful levers that can be used to disrupt the status quo and also require more funding. The economic interconnectedness of these issues underline how various stakeholders can play an important role in closing the equity gap.

Integrating gender perspectives into policies would strengthen the case for national and international financial investments in the implementation and enforcement of regulatory tools and mechanisms.

---

<sup>6</sup> Horn & Gebreyes “Erasing bias in emerging technologies – 3 considerations”, World Economic Forum, 31.8.2022.

<sup>7</sup> Greene & Bishen “Businesses can play a key role in advancing health equity worldwide”, World Economic Forum, 10.10.2022.

**This is a call for action** to ensure the Global Digital Compact advances equity through digital technology, helping build an inclusive, sustainable and gender-equal future where women’s voices are heard, their needs are met, and their potential is fulfilled.

Gender inequity in digital solutions may not be intentional, but our efforts to address the bias should be.

**This statement has been endorsed by the following entities:**

- Admiral Development Organization
- African Physiotherapy Aid
- African Women In Tech Startups
- Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi)
- Bayer Pharma AG
- Berlin Partner for Business and Technology
- Biba Transformations LBG
- Burundi Rugby League Rugby A XIII Cooperative
- Community Restoration Initiative Project
- doctHERs
- Echoing Green
- EQUALS Global Partnership
- Equality Now
- Falling Walls Foundation gGmbH
- GBBC (Global Blockchain Business Council)
- Genedos Cooperative
- Global Pre-eclampsia Initiative
- Good Hood Pty Ltd
- hapaSpace
- Hospitainer
- How Women Lead / How Women Invest
- ImpalaBridge
- International Trade Center/ ITC SheTrades Initiative
- Kaufmann & Company Rechtsanwaltsgesellschaft mbH
- Maternity Foundation
- MecRa Software and Communication Agency
- Missionpharma A/S
- Myanmar Youth Foundation for SDGs
- Nexleaf Analytics
- Nordic Innovation House Silicon Valley
- Oxbow Technologies
- Paniamor Foundation
- People Centered Internet
- Population Communication
- Population Council
- PROCOSI (Programa de Coordinación en Salud Integral)
- Rising Winners Youth Empowerment Initiative (RWYEI)
- Salesforce
- Society for Peace and Sustainable Development
- Sukaar Welfare Organization
- UN Global Pulse
- UNICC - United Nations International Computing Centre
- URUKUNDO Initiative
- USA for UNFPA
- Viamo
- Women in Entrepreneurship and Technology (WETECH)
- World Wide Web Foundation

**This statement has been endorsed by the following individuals:**

- Andrea Lucard
- Annie Lindmark
- Babita Coutinho
- Betty Pittard
- Burcu Avcıbay Vurgeç
- Eimear Savage
- Emmanuella Hammah
- Hope Ukaegbu
- Jennifer E McClure
- Kasahun
- Laura Holberger
- Dr Lennie Bazira

- Luma Lessa
- Mahdaoui Elkhansa
- Ma. Zophia Emmanuelle Tendido
- Muhammad Haris
- Okhala Muacanhia
- Rahul Choudhary
- Sascha Haselmayer
- Stella Dermosoniadi
- Tolotra Andriamanana
- Dr Tracy Gardner
- Victoria Cyrus

**If you wish to join this initiative and see your name or the name of your organization included here, register your endorsement [here](#) or send your confirmation to: [equity2030@unfpa.org](mailto:equity2030@unfpa.org)**

**You may find more information on the [Equity 2030 Alliance](#) webpage**