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***“DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality”***



**Editor - in – Chief: Prof.K.MANIMEKALAI**

Editors *Dr.I.Sivakumar*  
*Dr.P.Sindhuja*  
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**Editorial Desk**

The theme for International Women’s Day, 8 March 2023 (IWD 2023) is, “*DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality*”. This theme is aligned with the priority theme for the upcoming 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW-67), “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”. Bringing women and other marginalized groups into technology results in more creative solutions and has greater potential for innovations that meet women’s needs and promote gender equality. Their lack of inclusion, by contrast, comes with massive costs: as per UN Women’s Gender Snapshot 2022 report, women’s exclusion from the digital world has saved \$1 trillion from the gross domestic product of low- and middle-income countries in the last decade—a loss that will grow to \$1.5 trillion by 2025 without action.

A gender-responsive approach to innovation, technology and digital education can increase the awareness of women and girls regarding their rights and civic engagement. Advancements in digital technology offer immense opportunities to address development and humanitarian challenges, and to achieve the 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals.

## **DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality**

In recent years, the global push for gender equality has gained momentum, with various initiatives and movements advocating for the empowerment of women in all spheres of life. The DigitALL initiative stands at the intersection of innovation and technology, aiming to leverage digital advancements to bridge gender gaps and create an inclusive digital landscape. This E-Bulletin explores the key components and potential impact of DigitALL, shedding light on its significance in fostering gender equality.

Digitalization and digital tools hold immense promise as key enablers of women's empowerment, but also seriously imperil women's safety and rights. The widespread use of social media and digital platforms has facilitated the emergence of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, exacerbated by the increased use of online spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's and human rights defenders, women in politics and civil society organizations and coalitions, journalists, women with disabilities or belonging to minorities and LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) people are particularly targeted by online violence. Research suggests that online violence against women has severe impacts on their physical, psychological, social and reproductive health and may restrict their access to services and to information available through online, as well as their chances of being active digital citizens.

### **Introduction**

Digitalization is a central feature of modern societies and a functional tool for achieving sustainable development. Access to digital tools and technologies unlocks opportunities for social interaction. It is also key to the "future of work", and, more broadly, for the future of development. For example, telemedicine services can improve access to health care facilities, extend and improve health care coverage, while e-governance can support public services and increase interactions with users and their participation in decision-making processes. Systematic collection and use of disaggregated data can help to deliver tailored services and solutions based on needs and to address specific barriers. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and several of its targets point to the potential of digital technologies to contribute to sustainable development and to acceleration of human progress.

However, digitalization is not gender neutral. To unleash its full potential, its gender dimensions must be taken into consideration. Failing to understand and address differentiated impacts of technology on women and men is likely to increase the gender digital divide.

The digital divide between genders has been a persistent challenge, limiting access to opportunities, education, and economic resources for women. According to the International

Telecommunication Union (ITU), as of 2021, the global internet gender gap stands at 17%, with fewer women than men having access to the internet in developing countries. DigitALL emerges as a response to this issue, seeking to harness the power of innovation and technology to address gender disparities.

### **DigitALL aims to:**

- Increase digital literacy and access for women globally.
- Promote women's participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields.
- Support the development of tech-driven solutions to address gender-specific challenges.
- Foster an inclusive digital culture that embraces diversity.

### **Key Components of DigitALL:**

**Digital Literacy Programs:** According to a report by UNESCO, as of 2020, two-thirds of the global population lacked basic digital literacy skills, with women disproportionately affected. DigitALL focuses on developing and implementing digital literacy programs that cater specifically to women. These programs aim to enhance basic digital skills, thereby empowering women to navigate the online world, access information, and participate in the digital economy.

**STEM Education Initiatives:** Statistics from the World Economic Forum show that women remain underrepresented in STEM fields, constituting only 27% of the global STEM workforce. To address this gender gap, DigitALL supports educational initiatives that encourage women and girls to pursue careers in science and technology. This involves creating mentorship programs, scholarships, and awareness campaigns to break down stereotypes and inspire female participation in STEM disciplines.

**Tech-Based Solutions for Gender Equality:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), gender-based violence affects one in three women globally. DigitALL supports the development of innovative solutions that leverage technology to address gender-specific challenges. This includes projects related to healthcare, financial inclusion, and safety, with a focus on how technology can be harnessed to improve the well-being of women globally.

**Inclusive Workplace Policies:** According to a study by McKinsey and Company, companies with gender-diverse executive teams are 21% more likely to outperform their counterparts.

The initiative advocates for and works with organizations to adopt inclusive workplace policies, ensuring equal opportunities and representation for women in the tech industry. By promoting diversity and dismantling gender biases, DigitALL strives to create a more equitable work environment.

### **Potential Impact:**

**Economic Empowerment:** By enhancing digital literacy and encouraging women's participation in STEM fields, DigitALL has the potential to contribute significantly to women's economic empowerment. According to the World Bank, closing the gender gap in the labor market could increase global GDP by \$160 trillion by 2030. This, in turn, can lead to a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

**Social and Cultural Change:** DigitALL's emphasis on breaking gender stereotypes and fostering inclusivity in the digital realm can contribute to broader societal shifts. As more women gain access to technology and become active participants in the digital space, cultural norms around gender roles may evolve, as suggested by a study published in the Journal of Communication.

**Technological Innovation:** The initiative's support for tech-based solutions to address gender-specific challenges can lead to innovative breakthrough with broader societal benefits. By involving women in the development of technology, DigitALL ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to more comprehensive and effective solutions.

### **Framing actions for a Gender-equal Digital Inclusion:**

Mapping out stakeholders, whose active engagement or lack of it influences women's digital inclusion directly or indirectly, is the first step in designing an effective and feasible road map for change. It is key to understanding the international, national, regional and local contexts for women's digital empowerment to formulate strategies and to develop concerted actions. Policymakers, the private sector, civil society, academia, international and multilateral organizations must forge strong partnerships to ensure that women are involved in and contribute to the digital transformation, participate in policy-making processes and take advantage of ICTs to improve their livelihoods education, health and social mobility. If not adequately addressed, gender blindness in digital strategies may amplify gender inequalities.

**Access Barriers:** Despite the potential benefits, challenges related to access, affordability, and cultural norms may hinder the widespread success of DigitALL. According to the World

Economic Forum, in low-income countries, women are 23% less likely than men to own a mobile phone, limiting their access to digital resources. Addressing these barriers requires a collaborative effort involving governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

**Digital Inclusion:** Ensuring that the benefits of DigitALL reach marginalized and underserved communities is crucial for its success. According to a report by the Alliance for Affordable Internet, women in developing countries are 30-50% less likely to access the internet than men. Efforts should be made to tailor programs to specific cultural contexts and address intersectional challenges.

### **Conclusion:**

DigitALL represents a crucial step toward leveraging innovation and technology for the promotion of gender equality. By addressing digital disparities and fostering an inclusive digital culture, this initiative has the potential to create a more equitable and diverse world. However, ongoing collaboration and concerted efforts from various stakeholders are necessary to overcome challenges and maximize its impact. As DigitALL continues to evolve, it stands as a beacon of progress toward a future where technology is a catalyst for gender equality.

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