Cracking the code: Empowering rural girls and women through digital skills

Side event to the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women

United Nations Headquarters, Room I
UN Plaza, New York
14 March 2018

Background

While originally pioneered by women, computer science has become a career path largely dominated by men. Occupying only 24% of all jobs in the IT industry worldwide, women are heavily underrepresented in the digital world. The lack of gender diversity in the digital economy is inextricably linked to education and skills gaps in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies, attributable in part to gender norms and social expectations about girls’ and women’s abilities and career paths.

In the past decade, numerous initiatives have emerged to address these challenges. They aim at expanding girls’ awareness of, and engagement with STEM and computer science education and career pathways. However, they often target women and girls in urban centers and have little impact in rural areas. At the same time, rural women and girls could largely benefit from the potential of new technologies to meet their particular needs for economic and educational opportunities.
This side event will help to shed light on the situation globally, and what actions can be taken to ensure that the potential of the digital revolution is realized by women and girls in all corners of the world, including in rural settings. A starting point for the discussion are the findings of the groundbreaking UNESCO report and symposium “Cracking the Code”, as well as the outcomes of the G20 initiative #eSkills4Girls. Key experts from government, the private sector and civil society will share examples of good practice, and engage participants in an exercise aiming to develop concrete recommendations to empower women and girls in rural areas to become users, creators and innovators in the digital world.

UNESCO and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-organizers of the side event and co-leads of the EQUALS Skills Coalition, will mobilize the EQUALS partnership’s efforts to ensure girls’ and women’s essential and equal role in digital knowledge societies.

Objectives

- To build understanding of the status of the gender digital divide in rural women’s and girls’ access to and use of computers and the internet;
- To advance knowledge and understanding of the different factors that contribute to girls’ and women’s acquisition of digital skills and competencies, and the engagement and pursuit of ICT-related studies and careers;
- To showcase comprehensive examples undertaken by governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to ‘crack the code’, and to empower rural girls and women to be ICT users, creators and innovators through gender-responsive STEM education and skills training;
- To consult stakeholders from all groups on potential (political) principles that urge for gender-responsive digital skills trainings, in particular in the Global South.

Main expected outcomes

- Increased knowledge on the status of the gender digital divide, particularly as related to rural contexts
- Enhanced awareness of policies and practices that are effective in developing the digital skills of women and girls to enable them to become both ICT users and creators, and to close gender gaps in STEM fields
- Strengthened platform for global, regional and country networks, partnerships and cooperation to advance digital skills for girls and women
- Contributions from participants into the development of principles for governments to foster quality, gender-responsive digital skills training in education systems

Registration

Interested participants can register by completing the online registration form available at: http://sgiz.mobi/s3/CSWSideEvent

Not in New York? We will be livestreaming the event. Register above to receive a link to the webcast.

Contact

For queries about the event, email stem4girls@unesco.org
**Programme**

### Wednesday 14 March 2018:

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| 10:00 – 10:10 | **Opening session**  
**Opening remarks:** Saniye Gülser Corat, Director of the Division for Gender Equality, Office of the Director-General, UNESCO Headquarters  
**Video projection:** Cracking the code: Quality education, equally for all  
**Master of Ceremony:** Theophania Chavatzia, Programme Specialist, Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, UNESCO |
| 10:10 – 11:10 | **Panel Discussion:** Empowering rural women and girls through digital skills  
- Hon. Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, Minister of Communications, Ghana  
- Roland Lindenthal, Head of Unit “Education and the Digital World”, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany (BMZ)  
- Lauren Remedios, Global Monitoring and Evaluation Director, Barefoot College  
- Chisenga Muyoya, Founder of Asikana Networks, Zambia  
- Hemang Desai, Global Program Director, SAP Social Sabbatical Portfolio, Global Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)  
- Jessica Olivan, Director of Strategic Partnerships, ProMujer  
**Moderator:** Nanjira Sambuli, Digital Equality Advocacy Manager, World Wide Web Foundation  
**Question and answers and discussion** |
| 11:10 – 11:15 | **Closing remarks:** Justine Sass, Chief, Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, UNESCO |
Biographies

Opening remarks:

Saniye Gülser Corat is currently the Director for Gender Equality at UNESCO, and was the pioneer in making gender equality a global priority at UNESCO in 2007. She is a senior executive in international development with over 25 years of field experience in over 30 countries in Asia-Pacific, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South America, Europe, and North America.

Moderator:

Nanjira Sambuli is the Digital Equality Advocacy Manager at the World Wide Web Foundation. A Nairobi-based researcher and analyst, Nanjira has broad experience in advocacy, policy analysis, and research on governance, media, culture and society. She is also a columnist for the Daily Nation newspaper in Kenya, a member of DFID’s Digital Advisory Panel and served as a deputy on the United Nations High Level Panel for Women’s Economic Empowerment (2016-17).

Panelists:

Hon. Ursula Owusu-Ekuful is the Minister of Communications of Ghana and a Member of Parliament. She has served as the Chairperson for the Social Development Sector Committee – responsible for the development of policy interventions for women, children, persons with disability, the aged and all social intervention policies and programs. She has also held senior management posts at ZAIN Ghana, Western Telesystems (Westel), and at Akufo-Addo, Prempeh & Co., Legal Practitioners and Notaries Public.

Roland Lindenthal is the Head of Unit “Education and the Digital World”, BMZ. Prior to this, he had been responsible in the Ministry for German Development Cooperation with South Africa and Namibia (2007-08), as well as for UN Affairs (1999-2000) and development statistics (1996-98). Mr. Lindenthal is an Economist, and has also worked for the International Labour Organization (ILO) in both Headquarters (Geneva, 1990-96) and the field (South Africa and Indonesia) and for UNDP (Country Office Zimbabwe and Indonesia).

Lauren Remedios is the Global Monitoring and Evaluation Director at Barefoot College. She began there in 2013 when she was a graduate student at the Clinton School of Public Service. After graduating, she became responsible for global monitoring and evaluation for the Barefoot Solar Initiative, which operates in more than 90 countries. She is also the director of the 501(c) 3, Friends of Barefoot College International in the USA. Originally from India, she is inspired by “the Barefoot Approach,” which empowers women as change agents in the fight against poverty.

Chisenga Muyoya is a proactive leader with a deep passion for social change. She co-founded and leads Asikana Network, a social enterprise in Zambia that increases the participation of women and girls in technology. Named one of the top 30 young women leaders in Africa, Chisenga is a Mandela Washington Fellow, MILEAD Fellow, Global Shaper, Vital Voices Fellow, Chevening Scholar, TOYP Honouree and continuously demonstrates a strong commitment to service through her activism and volunteer work.

Hemang Desai is the Global Program Director for the award-winning SAP Social Sabbatical portfolio, within SAP’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) organization. He started his career as a marketing professional having held various leadership roles at SAP & the Philadelphia Inquirer, before following his passion to move into the CSR organization. Hemang has been actively involved in the non-profit sector for many years, and runs his own charitable foundation in the Philadelphia area for the past 7 years.

Jessica Olivan is the Director of Strategic Alliances at Pro Mujer, a development organization that provides financial, health, and education services to low-income women in Latin America. She is a founding Member and Advisor of SheWorks!, a Special Advisor for Value for Women, and a Senior Consultant on International Development, Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment. Prior to this, she worked 12 years at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Group in Washington, DC.