Please join UN Women and the World Wide Web Foundation for a breakfast event during the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62)

Universal Service and Access Funds: An Untapped Resource to Close the Digital Gender Divide

Monday, March 19, 2018
8:30am - 10:30am
19th Floor Conference Room, UN Women
Daily News Building | 220 East 42nd Street, New York

Please register your interest in advance.


Convened by the World Wide Web Foundation, the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) and UN Women, this breakfast meeting invites you to engage on the potential use of Universal Access and Service Funds to close the digital gender gap. The findings from a recent UN Women/A4AI/Web Foundation study of Universal Service and Access Funds (USAFs) in Africa will be showcased.

The discussion will be opened with brief remarks from:

- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Executive Director of UN Women
- Sonia Jorge, Executive Director, Alliance for Affordable Internet and Head of Digital Inclusion, Web Foundation

Followed by a presentation of the research by:

- Nanjira Sambuli, Digital Equality Advocacy Manager, World Wide Web Foundation
  - Presentation: Universal Service and Access Funds - An Untapped Resource to Close the Digital Gender Divide
And a panel discussion around how best to take action toward more effective use of USAFs:

- **Moderator:** Sonia Jorge, Executive Director, Alliance for Affordable Internet
- **Panelists:**
  - Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Executive Director of UN Women
  - Nanjira Sambuli, Digital Equality Advocacy Manager, World Wide Web Foundation
  - Representative of Government of Rwanda (TBC)
  - Representative of Government of Senegal (TBC)
  - Representative of Civil Society (TBC)
  - Representative from the Private Sector (TBC)

**Background:**
Achieving universal, affordable internet access is a key social and economic priority for countries around the world. The 193 member states of the United Nations agreed to work toward achieving this target by 2020 as part of the [Sustainable Development Goals](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/), and most countries have policies in place to ensure that internet access and use is a reality for all.

To this end, many countries have established communal funds dedicated to expanding connectivity opportunities to unserved and underserved communities. These funds, known as Universal Service and Access Funds (USAFs), are typically financed through mandatory contributions by mobile network operators and other telecommunications providers.

Making effective use of these funds is a critical step on the path to realising our shared goal of access for all. We are on track to reach 50% internet penetration in 2018 — an exciting milestone, to be sure, but one that also highlights the distance we have to go. Connecting the last four billion will not happen through market forces alone; it will require targeted efforts aimed at connecting those least likely to be connected, including those in poor, rural and hard-to-reach communities. Above all, it will require efforts particularly targeted at connecting women, who comprise the majority of those offline today.

And yet, USAFs remain, for the most part, an untapped resource for working toward these aims. Are USAF funds being used to close the digital divide and, specifically, the gender digital divide? What can governments and fund operators do to improve the impact of USAF-funded initiatives and accelerate efforts to connect women and close the digital divide?

Failure to take urgent action to close the digital divide — and to use resources dedicated specifically to doing so — will further widen the gulf between the digital have-haves and the digital have-nots, undermining economic growth and stunting global development in the process.