



Women & Girls in ICT

Connected Africa Summit (CAS)

Uhuru Gardens, Nairobi, Kenya

22-25 April 2024

[Digital for Girls and Women project](#)

The Digital for Girls and Women project, implemented by Enabel in Belgium, Burkina Faso, and Uganda, aims to create equal opportunities for women and girls to participate in an inclusive, rights-based digital economy. The project provides valuable insights into incorporating gender perspectives in digital initiatives.

The Connected Africa Summit is an annual event where industry captains and government leaders gather to discuss the role of digital economy in Africa's growth and development, emerging opportunities and urgent challenges.

The Digital for Girls and Women team partnered with CAS in Nairobi to coordinate a series of panel discussions on the topic of the gender digital divide. African and European gender experts, students from Thika Technical Institute and the Nairobi Technical Training Institute, as well as the EU and Belgian Ambassador, were invited to participate in the discussions and the plenary meetings.

The D4GW team took the opportunity to interview participants, gathering their perspectives on the challenges women and girls face in ICT and potential solutions to bridge the gender digital divide.

List of Participants

Ahmed, Shamira, Chair of the D4D Hub Civil Society and Academia Advisory Group (South Africa)

Jākobsone, Ieva, Founder of She Rebuilds the World, Professor at the John Cabot University (Rome, Italy)

Kassou, Meryem, Founder of Digitis (Morocco)

Kiswendsida Kouraogo, Noëlie, Director of Mys'TIC (Burkina Faso)

H.E. Maddens, Peter, Ambassador of Belgium to Kenya

Mbua, Paul, Chair of the D4D Hub Private Sector Advisory Group (Cameroon)

Mwendwa, Irene, Executive Director at Pollicy (Uganda)

Ndanu, Angela, Final-year student in information science at Thika Technical Training Institute (Kenya)

Nduka Oyom, Ada, Founder of She Code Africa (Nigeria)

Nonhlanhla Makwakwa, Onica, Digital Inclusion & Gender Equality Specialist (South Africa)

Obara, Millicent, Instructor at the Thika Technical Training Institute, ICT-department (Nairobi, Kenya).

Odhiambo, Erly Sheillah, first-year student in computer science at Thika Technical Training Institute (Kenya)

Onek Tandekwiri, Vanessa, Consultant with Startup Uganda

Tapsoba, Malick, Digitalization and innovation expert, Digital for Girls and Women (Burkina Faso)

Wangui, Margaret, second-year student in ICT at Nairobi Technical Training Institute (Kenya)

Wanyony, Jesca Tracy, Second-year student and Thika Technical Training Institute, Kenya

Is The Gender Digital Divide Real?

Malick Tapsoba:

“The Digital for Girls and Women project is based on the observation that there is a gender digital divide in technology access between men and women, and that this divide is much more pronounced in rural areas, specifically for girls and women.”

Vanessa Onek Tandekwiri:

“I think in most countries there is inequitable access, both in access and in digital skills. There is an unequal distribution, especially in under-served and hard-to-reach communities. This includes refugee and host communities, people with disabilities, women running the households. An additional barrier is the culture that hinders women’s participation in the digital economy. The gap is still huge.”



Vanessa Tandekwiri



Noelie Kouarogo

Noelie Kiswendsida Kouraogo:

“Based on my experience as a member of a women's organization working in the field of information and communication technologies, I think that the digital divide between women and men is quite significant, particularly in Burkina, where we see that young girls and women are less interested in ICT than men.

For a man, especially in the context of Burkina, it's much easier to be in the digital space and express himself than it is for a woman. There's often harassment, there's intimidation. This is the challenge that women and girls face.”

Ieva Jākobsone:

“When you look at the academic world, we might assume that women are empowered. Unfortunately, when you look at statistics of private businesses, the government and the NGO sector, the percentage of women leaders is very, very low. If we look at the Fortune 500 companies, the percentage of female leaders is around 10%. In ICT, it's just 5% of women leaders. So my question is: Why is this the case? Why are we not where we need to be?”



Ieva Jakobsonē



Meryem Kassou

Meryem Kassou:

“I think that the gender divide in ICT is still significant and important, and it is good that it has been addressed as a real issue. I think it derives from multiple factors, including cultural norms that put some heavy weight and expectations on women, especially considering that they have other roles to play in society.”

H.E. Peter Maddens:

“There is a digital divide in Kenya, but also all over the world. There's a gender divide in Africa in general, which is larger than in other parts of the world. A lot of that has to do with culture and with the level of development.

Kenya is starting to become a middle-income country, and you see that the gender digital divide is also starting to be addressed. Not fast enough, not fundamentally or not strongly enough, but it's starting. You can see this in the IT sector, which is vibrant in Kenya. There are a lot of women in the IT sector in Kenya.”

What Are The Barriers for Women and Girls?

Ada Nduko Oyom:

“The first barriers are access to financial resources and infrastructure. A lot of girls are interested in technology, but they don’t even own a mobile phone. They often cannot afford internet data, even for a day. And if you want to proceed in STEM, you will consume a lot of data.

And then there is the lack of role models as well. Women in the workforce need to learn how to advance professionally. This is difficult for many women because they don’t see other women in senior roles.



Ada Nduko Oyom



Malick Tapsoba and a CAS participant from Safaricom

Also, in the recruitment process or in promotions in the workplace there is a lot of unconscious bias. At a certain moment, women might want to start a family, and we often see that they need to sacrifice one or the other: starting a family or grow in their career.

Workplace policies also play a role. These often do not encourage the growth of these women. Policies in STEM or technology are written without mothers in mind, which makes it difficult for them to keep showing up at work.”

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In some communities, the idea of women using a phone—let alone accessing the internet or engaging with male customers—is unthinkable. Cultural and societal norms often restrict their digital freedom, creating significant barriers to inclusion.

— Malick Tapsoba

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How Can We Close the Gender Digital Divide?

Malick Tapsoba:

“The first step in bridging the digital divide for women and girls is ensuring easier access to digital tools. Having a computer or an internet connection is essential—it’s the foundation for digital inclusion.

Once access is secured, the next priority is equipping women with the necessary skills and competencies to navigate the digital world effectively. Digital literacy empowers them to make full use of technology for personal and professional growth.



Onica Nonhlanhla Makwakwa



Irene Mwenda

However, access and skills alone are not enough. The digital world comes with risks, and it is crucial to raise awareness about digital rights and online safety. Women and girls need to be informed about potential dangers and how to protect themselves, enabling them to engage in socio-economic activities with confidence.

Importantly, digital rights are not just a concern for women and girls—they are a cross-cutting issue that affects society as a whole. Governments, civil society, journalists, and traditional and religious authorities all play a role in promoting safe and inclusive digital access. By involving all these stakeholders, we can create an environment where women and girls can fully benefit from digital opportunities.”

Irene Mwendwa:

“At Pollicy in Uganda, we run *Data Ladies*, a program that simplifies complex topics like machine learning, AI, and data science. Our goal is to prevent young women from feeling discouraged by technical jargon. We invite women in tech to break down these concepts into simple, accessible language. Making technology understandable is key to ensuring that people with low literacy can engage and stay informed.

Data for social good is data that can be exploited to assure better private and public service delivery. At Pollicy we help women and girls to engage and understand data science and technology.

Pollicy works at the intersection of data and technology, collaborating with diverse communities to ensure data is used to drive social change in our countries. Africans naturally organize through community-driven structures, empowering and engaging one another. Data should follow the same approach—Africans must take control of their data and use it to strengthen their communities. While Africa is at the forefront of digital innovation, with startups and youth-driven solutions emerging rapidly, it is crucial to mainstream digital transformation and data governance.”

“ Too often, tech companies develop products based on external data that fail to reflect [African] culture, norms, and the way we organize communities.

— Irene Mwendwa

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We also spearhead research for Africans by Africans on how we use the internet and how we use digital services. Many female professionals in media, engineers, women in public health, they're saying we need more opportunities to engage in the responsible use of our data and technologies. We need opportunities to promote some of the [local] languages that are used online.

The government is uniquely placed to close the gender digital gap, but there needs to be political goodwill. We can build our own platforms, that serve us, Africans. The problems and

the solutions lie in the governments who are the big custodians of our data.”

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If we want to close the gender digital divide, governments have an important role to play. They can adopt gender mainstreaming in the ICT policies. They need to ensure that every support or funding has gender equity in it. If the government drives this agenda, the private sector will follow

— **Onica Nonhlanhla Makwakwa**

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Meryem Kassou:

“The main driver for women to start their entrepreneurial journey is having financial independence. In Morocco, we currently have a momentum. Women have access to technology and have access to funding. It is one of the major objectives, having more female entrepreneurs, more inclusive work environments and better representation in the tech industry.”



Interactive panel session organized by the Digital for Girls and Women project team

Noelie Kiswendsida Kouraogo:

“Mys’TIC was created in 2014 in Burkina Faso by a group of young women with the ambition to contribute to reducing the digital divide. What's important to note is that we're not all experts or specialists in the field of ICT. But we did realize that ICT can be a major help, it's a space where we can make ourselves heard. We also organize the Myst’TIC blog award when we realized that - when blogs became popular in Burkina - there were more male bloggers than female bloggers, to promote their visibility.

Mys'TIC also offers legal support. For example, we've made an interpellation in the case of a musician who had been assaulted, stripped naked, and whose videos were circulating on social networks. We sent a letter to the authorities asking them to enforce measures to protect women and girls in the digital space.”

The Importance of Education

Irene Mwendwa:

“One of the biggest steppingstones to advance in technology is encouraging women to enter STEM courses. Many countries in Africa have adapted their courses and qualifications to ensure that women can advance in the sector.

But more needs to be done. There could be an opportunity for government, for the public service, to ensure that there is some sort of mandatory mentorship. After finishing university, you might work for a public service, and you need to make sure that the people you are working with can support your ideas. Many times, ideas fall through cracks because innovative ideas are not taken any further. There needs to be better management and mentorship, particularly post-university.”



Erly Sheillah Odhiambo



Margaret Wangui and fellow students

Erly Sheillah Odhiambo:

“The reason why I chose to study computer science was my passion for communication, computers and technologies. We know of cyber bullying and other effects of social media, and if we can improve this maybe people won't lose their lives.

My parents and my family are my biggest support. When I told them I wanted to study ICT, they told me to go for it, to chase my dreams.

There is nothing like “women can’t do this”. Women can do everything a man can do. Your dreams are as valid as a man’s dreams.”

Angela Ndanu:

“I study ICT because you can apply for many jobs in various fields. You can also work as a record manager, as an archivist. There are many possibilities”

Jesca Tracy Wanyony:

“Personally, I have an interest in cybersecurity. Every day, people are hacked, and information is accessed illegally. So that’s why I was like “Why not take this course?”. Maybe I can help someone.

There’s a saying: “What a man can do, a women can do better”. I think it’s just that mentality, that men are better at technology. But it’s a matter of believing in yourself and that as a young lady, you can do this. If a man can do it, why can’t I as a young lady do the same thing? It’s all about finding the right help and sources.”



Interactive panel session organized by the Digital for Girls and Women project team

Margaret Wangui:

“I want to specialize in coding and programming. I liked it since high school. That's where I started my computer lessons.

As a young lady, as the young generation we are, I feel it’s important to study technology, because everything now is technology-based, and everything is transforming. Like the manual things we had there before, now it's done by technology.

I'm just glad on how you came with the idea about inviting ladies. Ladies and women, they had no voice before. I like how you have given us power right now.

We can speak for ourselves. We can stand by ourselves. We are independent, as the young ladies, as the young woman, we are.”

Millicent Obara:

“The world is going digital, we are all aware of that. Now we are in the space of AI. We realized that, in the past, women did not embrace technology or engineering courses. It really excites me to see these young ladies come to the Thika Technical Institute, and they excel at it. It’s exciting. We see more ladies coming to study ICT.

The future is bright. In Kenya, ladies have been embraced in all sectors, ICT included. It’s nice to see that at the Connected Africa Summit they can network with other ladies, it’s an encouragement.”

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If you have to put a priority on development activities, for me, it's always education first. So simple. Finish school. See where it takes you. And don't let yourself get pushed down by anyone because you're just as good at anything as anybody else.

— **H.E. Peter Maddens**

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Ada Nduka Oyom:

“I studied microbiology at university, so I was aware of the challenges that ladies from under-served communities and non-traditional backgrounds face when going into STEM. I first started a blog, then it evolved into a community and now She Code Africa is a full-blown non-profit organization that provides girls with free access to digital skills training. She Code Africa is also providing one-on-one mentorship in collaboration with the private sector. ”

What is the Role of CSOs, Private Sector and Government?

Shamira Ahmed:

“The combination of civil society and academia is important to achieve a human-centered digital transformation. Civil society can add value through their networks working with local communities and having more of a practical approach navigating digital inequities and the digital ecosystem. And academia, on the other hand, can contribute to evidence-based and rigorous policy interventions. So, co-creating solutions between those two groups is quite important for us to actually have a human-centered digital transformation that's based on local demand and local issues, and also will help enhance co-creation between the EU and its developing partners in whatever country it works on.”

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The key takeaway is that bridging this divide requires a collective effort. A whole-of-society approach is essential, with government, the private sector, and civil society all actively and intentionally engaged. Civil society organisations have taken the lead by offering training, mentorship and other measures to close the gap.

— **Onica Nonhlanhla Makwakwa**

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Paul Mbua:

“I think the private sector has a great role to play in reducing the gender digital divide. Many private companies offer capacity building programs for female employees. That’s where we see clear progress. The private sector needs expertise in complex issues such as AI, machine learning, data science and so on. That’s what pushes us forward. We need to train the people. That will help the private sector boost employment and hence, productivity.”

Ada Nduka Oyom:

“It is very important to liaise with the private sector. Private companies have outreach and the financial resources to make a difference in reducing the gender divide. They also have the possibility to provide professional women in the technology sector with a mentorship role to

girls. So, we need to partner with the private sector, it can give initiatives like this an advantage or a leverage and can increase impact.”



Paul Mbua



H. E. Peter Maddens

Advice for Projects Aiming at Closing the Digital Divide

Malick Tapsoba:

“First, it's crucial to have everyone at the table, which is exactly what we did with the Digital for Girls and Women project. We launched it with the participation of all levels of society, ensuring a clear understanding of the project’s goals and the role each stakeholder plays in its implementation.

Second, the project is grounded in real needs identified in the field. It builds on the successes and lessons learned from two previous projects (2019–2023), incorporating their feedback and recommendations.

Finally, a strong institutional foundation is essential. The support of administrative authorities—whether the ministry in charge of digital technology or regional bodies—ensures effective project management and long-term impact.”

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It doesn't make sense to offer digital skills before there is infrastructure
—Ieva Jākobsone

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Prof. Ieva Jakobsone:

At She Rebuilds the World, we focus on building women's confidence while also providing a strong support system. Beyond digital skills training, we create a network of professional women and alumni, offering mentorship and career opportunities. The core strength of our project is fostering this sisterhood, where women uplift and support each other. We also collaborate with local organizations that help commercialize their ideas, such as the *Entrepreneurship Hub* and *Business Lab* at the University of Lusaka.”

Vanessa Onek:

Significant progress has been made in bridging the gap through a collective effort involving the government, private sector, investors, and development partners like Enabel. Together, they assess existing capacities, identify priority areas for support, and determine the best-positioned actors to deliver effective solutions.

How can we make sure that we are closing the gap and that our efforts are sustainable in the long run? It is important to identify the local actors, what they are doing, who can complement those efforts and how we can support them to achieve sustainable change.





The Enabel D4GW team with the D4D Hub and GIZ



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