



#AfricaDisruptCSW67



THE LILONGWE DECLARATION

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The African Women's Development and
Communications Network
Power | Soul | Solidarity | Voice



PREAMBLE

We, the delegates of the Africa CSW67 meeting physically and virtually comprising of more than 200 distinguished delegates from 21 African countries convened in Lilongwe, Malawi from the 28th February to the 2nd March 2023 for the second African Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (Africa CSW). Representation included women, girls, non-binary persons, persons with disabilities, government representatives, members of the Malawi parliament, political leaders, traditional leaders, women and girls living in rural areas and informal settlements, media representatives, development partners (UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral partners and INGOs) and private sector.

Under the theme Unpacking Innovation, Technology and Education in the Digital Age for Women and Girls, the delegates re-emphasized the contribution of African women and girls innovators in technological advancements in their countries, continentally and globally; reflected on the progress and challenges on the technological gender divide; consolidated perspectives from localized contexts and co-developed a common agenda and voice on advancing gender transformative policies and practices that are centered on safety, well-being, inclusivity, affordability and sustainability. The deep conversations and provocations challenged the patriarchal and colonial underpinnings embedded in the design of digital technology.

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DURING THE AFRICA CSW67, DELEGATES NOTED, WITH CONCERN, THAT:

1. LIMITED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

We are in the middle of the 4th Industrial Revolution with minimal progress made towards a dedicated and continuous skills revolution to include subjects such as robotics, artificial intelligence and coding at basic education level that will inevitably result in the revamping and reshaping of the school curriculum system. The majority of girls and women in Africa have limited access to basic education thus being denied the opportunity to optimally engage and contribute to the digital revolution.

2. LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Despite the number of people with cellular phones increasing in recent years, many women and girls lag behind when it comes to access to cellular phones with a very small number of women and girls being able to own smartphones. The majority of rural communities in Africa lack the infrastructure and enabling environment to adequately tackle the gender digital divide. Investment in infrastructure and opportunities for a digital transformation is largely in urban areas. Despite the number of people with cellular phones increasing in recent years, many women and girls in all their diversities lag behind when it comes to access to, ownership of and control over digital devices, products and services.

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3. DISPROPORTIONATE BURDEN OF CARE

Women and girls still conduct a disproportionate burden of care work. This is also increasing because of multiple intersecting crises including climate change, conflicts and disease outbreaks. Most African governments do not prioritize gender transformative responses that support women and girls in their diversity to be resilient while still engaging as active participants in the economy including the digital economy.

4. LACK OF INCLUSIVITY IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Over the years, African women and girls in all their diversity have witnessed the deliberate muting and silencing of their voices in key policy and decision-making processes and spaces in innovation and technology. This invalidates the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”. The persistent exclusion of a diversity of languages in the design and development of digital platforms and tools continued to exacerbate inequalities and discrimination.

5. INACCESSIBLE DIGITAL FINANCIAL SERVICES

Even as the digital financial services sector continues to grow faster in Africa including e-commerce, mobile money, and transactions through debit and credit cards, women and girls continue to face barriers to participating fully in the digital economy as creators and consumers of technology. The internet is still overpriced in many African countries while in other areas, especially the rural areas, it is not accessible due to limited connectivity and unreliable electricity. The cumbersome administrative processes to obtain official documents for women and young girls in rural areas slow progress to access new technologies. Increasing cases of fraudulent cyber crimes have targeted women, especially elderly women, women with disabilities and young women.

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6. LACK OF DIGITAL SAFETY FRAMEWORKS

Women and girls continue to experience online gender-based violence, due to impunity and the lack of online regulation, which is worsened by the lack of comprehensive cyber security policy and legal frameworks. As of January 2023, less than ten African countries^[1] have legislated and invested in data and privacy protection policies and regulatory frameworks, in line with the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (2014).

7. LOW ONLINE GOVERNANCE

Many governments interfere with private communications by tapping through the different forms of communication such as emails and phone conversations. Some social media activists have also been arrested before for their views posted on different social media platforms. The high rate of tax on digital gadgets makes them highly unaffordable and inaccessible. There is also the inadequate prioritization of budget allocations to digitization and digital safety for women, girls, non-binary and persons with disabilities. Inadequate accountability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) providers and stakeholders on violations of human rights in designing platforms that perpetuate discrimination, inequalities and cyber violence against women, girls, non-binary and persons with disabilities.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. STRENGTHENED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN STEM

Education systems, beginning at the early development stage, must be adjusted to promote and facilitate access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects for young women, girls, women living in rural areas and women with disabilities. Digital literacy content should also be context-specific considering issues of language, ability and access to electricity and internet connectivity. In order to promote the sustained upskilling of women and girls in all their diversities, as we move through the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we call for the deliberate and strategic placement of science and technology centers in marginalized communities and the sustained consideration of language justice.

2. IMPROVED ACCESS TO DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The digital infrastructure in rural and urban communities must be resourced adequately particularly in facilitating the accessibility and connectivity for adolescent girls and young women, persons with disabilities and women and girls in rural areas and informal settlements.

3. RADICAL REDISTRIBUTION OF CARE WORK

Governments in Africa need to recognize and value care work as a vital contributor to the economy, in addition to rewarding and redistributing care work. There is a need to innovatively expand the care infrastructure and services as well as exploring innovative ways to finance and incentivise care work.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



4. EQUITABLE DIGITAL FINANCIAL SERVICES

Advocate for repurposing existing infrastructure to increase accessibility to digital banking platforms for gender transformative financial inclusivity. In pursuit of women's economic justice and independence, governments should facilitate the repurposing of obsolete and existing infrastructure to accommodate access to digital banking in peripheral communities. This should be accompanied by extensive training and protection mechanisms to reduce digital vulnerabilities, as well as the subsidization of bank charges and data to ensure sustained accessibility. This is especially important as In Kenya for example, 60% of women in all their diversities remain unbanked as a result of inaccessibility while at least 38% of Egyptian, Moroccan and Tunisian women have no bank accounts. In Zimbabwe only 3.52% of the loans provided by the banking industry (for any purposes) were advanced to women due to the vast majority not meeting the requirements for a (large) loan.

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Soul

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS • • •



5. PRIORITIZE DIGITAL SAFETY AND PROTECTION

African Government must strengthen policy and legal frameworks on cyber security to protect women, girls, persons living with disabilities and gender conforming groups from cyber violence. This further requires the full ratification, domestication and implementation of international and regional agreements, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). The deliberate consideration of the protection and preservation of indigenous knowledge, languages and cultures should be reflected in this localization. In addition to this, the promotion and knowledge of digital rights and consequences for violations are essential. This should be complimented in the design of tools, systems and policies that allow for the improved protection, detection, response to and monitoring of technologically assisted gender-based violence (GBV) and criminalization of gendered online violations.



Power

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS • • •

6. HUMAN-RIGHTS CENTERED GOVERNANCE

In the promotion of digital accessibility, Africa governments should regulate telecommunication companies especially on lowering the cost of data and taxes on digital products as this poses a challenge to freedom of access to information. Governments should ensure gender responsive budgetary allocations and commitments to facilitate inclusive, safe and sustainable digital initiatives.



Feminist, public-private innovation financing mechanisms that aim to address context specific challenges should be built into policy frameworks, ensuring that big-tech ICTs companies remain accountable to the communities that they serve, only generate software that does not violate human rights and is responsive to the research of Afro-feminist digital actors.



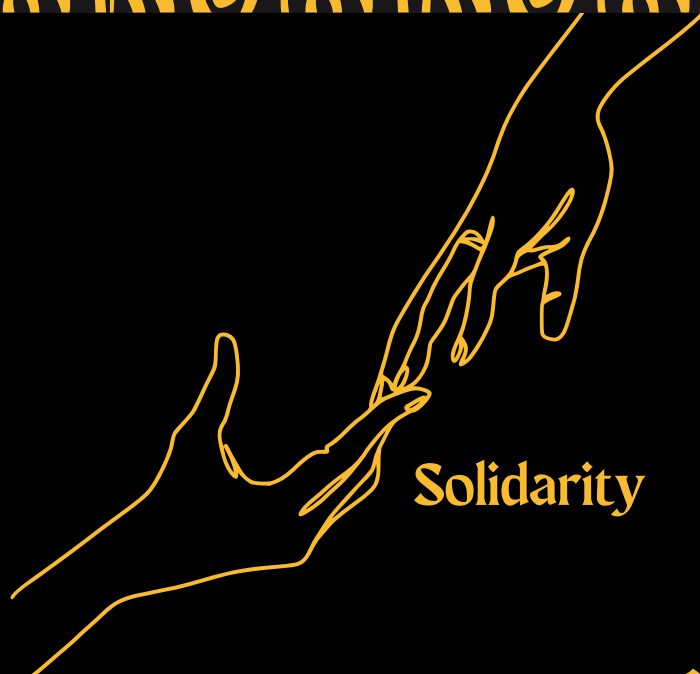
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



7. MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN & GIRLS IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY AT CSW AND OTHER GLOBAL SPACES

Every year thousands of women and girls in all their diversities gather in New York to participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the largest global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. Being held in New York every year, African women and girls in all their diversities have not meaningfully engaged or participated in CSW because of factors like visas and high costs related to travel and accommodation. While we acknowledge this global policy-making process as critical to the advancement of gender equality, African women and girls in all their diversities have been left behind.

We therefore urge the UN Commission on the Status of Women Bureau and the Member States, the General Assembly and the UN Secretary General to urgently review the methods of work and adopt the principle of rotation of venue for the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings, limiting exclusionary tendencies and prioritizing active inclusion.



Solidarity



The Lilongwe Declaration 2023

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