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DigitALL: Harnessing the Digital Age to Empower Women and Girls

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In today's digital age, technology has become an integral part of our lives, transforming the way we work, communicate, and access information. However, there is a significant gender gap when it comes to the use and access to technology. Women and girls are often left behind, facing barriers that prevent them from fully benefiting from the digital revolution. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reports that more than 50% of the world's women are offline.

The digital gender gap refers to the disparity in access to and use of digital technologies between men and women. According to a report by the ITU, women are 23% less likely to have access to the Internet in low- and middle-income countries. This gap widens even further when it comes to digital skills and employment opportunities. The Web Foundation found that in Africa and Asia, women who have some secondary education are six times more likely to be online than women with only primary education or less.

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There are several factors that contribute to the digital gender gap. Societal norms and stereotypes play a significant role in shaping the opportunities available to women and girls. Cultural biases and gender expectations often limit their access to education and training in the field of technology. Additionally, economic barriers and lack of infrastructure further exacerbate the divide. A Web Foundation survey found 35% of young women and girls reported that the online sharing of private, intimate images and videos without their consent was their top concern about using the internet.

Digital technologies are at the forefront of development and provide a unique opportunity for countries to accelerate economic growth and connect citizens to services and jobs. But digital technologies could lead to more economic and social inequalities unless women are empowered by having access to technology and acquiring the skills needed to benefit from it.

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. "TeacherConnect offers a wide range of educational content and resources, and it has well-organised menus, simple sign-up processes, and easy access to features. This platform is also loved by my foundation teachers, who are all

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females," said Mrs Tselane Ntetshe, a foundation phase departmental head at Tjantjello Primary School.

The TeacherConnect platform has been selected as a global digital accelerator for the groundbreaking digital service and targets all teachers in public schools, 68% of whom are female. The Aspen Institute and HP Digital Equity Accelerator is a programme that aims to help not-for-profit organisations promote digital equity and inclusion in their communities. The programme was launched in 2020 and is part of HP's broader commitment to bridge the digital divide. The programme provides funding, training, and support to ten not-for-profit organisations and NGOs working to reduce the opportunity gap in underserved communities. "We are excited to be named as one of the ten recipients of Aspen Institute and HP Digital Equity Accelerator from the 120 equally competitive applicants. The resources from Accelerator will assist Ecubed (DBE-E^3) to achieve its bold goal of using low-tech platforms like TeacherConnect to drive inclusivity and equity", said Ms Crysty Swift, Ecubed (DBE-E^3) Head of Product.

The teachers that TeacherConnect targets reach more than 13 million learners, using resources from the TeacherConnect platform to assist in ensuring that these learners can actively participate in the workforce, contribute to innovation, and drive economic development. They can also access information and resources that empower them to make informed decisions about their further education and overall well-being.

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We need the talents and voices of women and girls brought to the boardrooms and coding rooms. Today many innovations in AI, medicine, entertainment, transportation, work, and other fields treat men as the standard and ignore women's physical and social differences – to the detriment of half of the world's population. Getting more women into careers in technology starts with breaking down the gender stereotypes that prevent girls from studying STEM subjects.

Women entrepreneurs play a key role in developing economies. Supporting them to start and grow businesses through technology will lead to more sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Given equal opportunities, women will flourish and contribute to creative solutions to tackle the world's multi-faceted challenges.

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