EQUALS
The Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age

BACKGROUND

Twenty-one years after the Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995) establishing a roadmap for achieving gender equality, much progress has been made, but the targeted goals are yet to be realized (World Economic Forum, 2016a). Gender-based inequalities persist across a range of areas from violence to wage gaps (UN Women, 2015). The proliferation of technological tools such as computers, mobile phones and the internet holds the potential to help reduce these inequalities.

Against this backdrop, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically target enhancing the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to promote women's empowerment (SDG 5, Target 8). Yet even on this front, stark disparities are evident. These disparities range from gaps in access to and use of digital technologies, to limits in women's professional participation in the technology industry (ITU, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2016b). Recent International Telecommunications Union (ITU) statistics, for example, indicate that the global gender gap in internet use is increasing (up from 11% in 2013 to 12% in 2016).

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

EQUALS: the Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, is an initiative launched by ITU and UN Women in September 2016. EQUALS is forming a coalition of programs dedicated to promoting gender equality in technology and ensuring that significant strides are made towards this goal. The EQUALS Partnership is projected to run from 2016-2022.

The Partnership consists of three areas of action (Access, Skills and Leadership) and a fourth crosscutting function, Research (Table 1).

Table 1: EQUALS Areas of Action

ACCESS Achieve equal access to digital technologies	SKILLS Empower women and girls with skills to become ICT creators/innovators	LEADERSHIP Promote women as ICT leaders and entrepreneurs
RESEARCH Develop data and evidence to combat the growing gender digital divide		

AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

Data and research evidence are critical components of the EQUALS initiative (Figure 1). Inadequate information (such as lack of gender disaggregated data) can both mask unrecognized challenges and underestimate progress, leading to misguided policy and action or inaction.
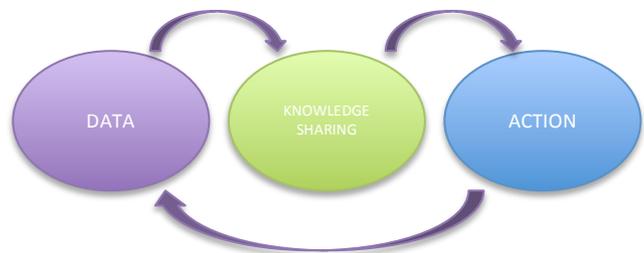
Figure 1: The EQUALS Model.

UNU-CS leads the EQUALS research function and is forming a Research Group that will work to ensure an evidence-based approach to achieve the Partnership goals. The Research Group's functions will include:

- Developing the research agenda for the Partnership
- Advising on data requirements and appropriate indicators
- Supporting efforts to source relevant data
- Supporting efforts to source research funds
- Providing subject matter and methodology expertise for research design, data collection and analysis

- Tracking progress towards Partnership targets
- Developing research and policy outputs
- Facilitating data and knowledge sharing

Members may come from academia, the private sector, civil society, international organizations and governments. Membership commitments will vary, but must include one or more tangible inputs such as research funds, data and research analysis expertise or human resources (e.g. student and scholar time).

As leader of the Research Group, UNU-CS will collaboratively develop and manage the research strategy of the Group based on the needs and priorities of the EQUALS Partnership.

RESEARCH AREAS

While specific research agendas will be generated over time, the Research Group will be guided by several broad concerns identified by the Access, Skills and Leadership Coalitions. More and better data is needed in these areas to improve comprehension of the dimensions of gender tech gaps and to develop and test appropriate solutions: access strategies and policies; affordability; infrastructure; safety; mentorship; content; administration; digital entrepreneurship; and retention,

The primary sources of data for the Research Group will be EQUALS partners, who are expected to share industry and community data to enable examination and tracking of the Partnership targets. In addition, primary research may be commissioned to fill other gaps in knowledge (depending on resource availability).

SAMPLE PROJECTED OUTPUTS

a) Annual flagship report on digital gender equality; other reports and whitepapers
b) Research and design projects and solutions
c) Datasets (e.g. organization data, primary and secondary research data)
d) Collaboration platforms (e.g. online data sharing and collaboration site)
e) Planning, knowledge-sharing or action-provoking events (e.g. virtual and in-person Research Group seminars, research dissemination, gender tech events)

2017 PRELIMINARY WORKPLAN

First Quarter:
- Conceptualize initial Research Group structure and operational elements
- Draft preliminary high-level research plan
- Report on digital inclusion mapping research conducted with ITU

Second Quarter:
- Recruit Research Group members
- Develop plan for annual flagship report

Third Quarter:
- Recruit Research Group members
- Develop online platform for data and knowledge sharing

Fourth Quarter:
- Data collection and analysis for first flagship report
- Preliminary draft of first flagship report (e.g. baseline data, state of knowledge on digital gender equality)

PROGRESS UPDATE

Database and mapping activity
UNU-CS, in partnership with ITU, undertook an exercise to gather information on existing programs targeting digital gender equality. Methods used included desk research, surveys and interviews with officers of identified programs. Current outputs include a database of 241 programs and an interactive visualization of these programs (Figure 2). A technical report and an academic article are in progress.
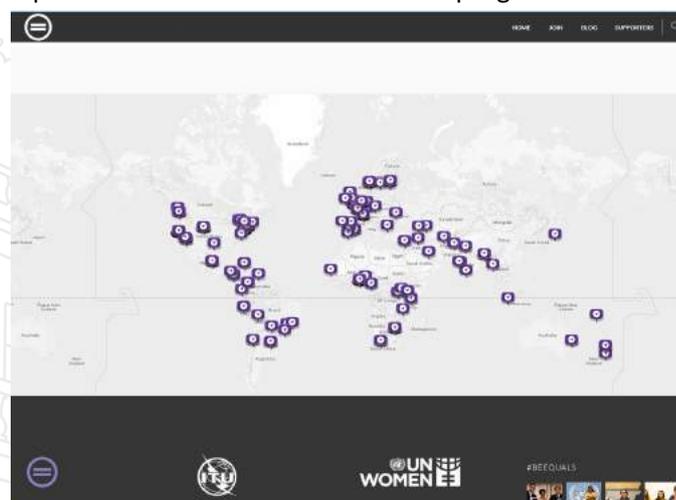

Figure 2: EQUALS gender digital inclusion map (http://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Pages/equalsGDImap.aspx)

This research showed, amongst other things, that most initiatives are led by civil society organizations, the majority focus on providing ICT skills training (over one-third) and there are relatively limited numbers of mentoring and advocacy projects (EQUALS, 2017). One of the main barriers to success identified by stakeholders was inadequate gender-specific data – an area the EQUALS Research Group intends to address.

Building the Research Group

The formation of the Group was announced at the January 2017 World Economic Forum meeting. The main recruitment effort begins in March 2017. We have obtained preliminary expressions of interest in joining the Group from: Members of the Berkman Klein Center (Harvard University); Digital Hub Asia; and the Communication Leadership program (University of Washington). This inaugural cohort will be launched at the March 2017 Broadband Commission meeting.

TEAM

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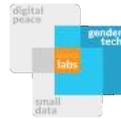
LABS

This project is part of the Gender Tech Lab.

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