

Embedding gender in technology development to ensure that innovation meets the needs of women and girls

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Summary of text:

Gender equality in innovation and technology should not concern the design of new tools, platforms or applications which serve the needs of girls. Rather, it should focus on the reimagining of how innovations in policy, management, finance, science and technology can be collectively approached and disrupted so that they become inclusive of all genders and increase awareness and availability of opportunities.

At present, gender-based discrimination reduces the average number of years girls spend at school by 16 percent, which amounts to an overall reduction in the global income of USD \$6 trillion. In industry, nearly half of all countries in the Gender Index prohibit women from entering certain professions.

The conservation and availability of data on women in the technology industry is scarce, and often based on the perception that women and girls face different levels of willingness and capacity to participate and benefit from technological innovations. This 'lack of interest' rationale is misleading, as it hides social and normative determinants which hinder women and girls' access and willingness to engage with the technology industry. When out of context data is shared by the media in relation to the gender digital divide, it can lead to misinterpretation and confusion. To overcome this confusion, it is necessary to investigate digital literacy and learning with a gender lens to understand what hinders girls' ability to access and use technological tools and services.

More data is required to understand the benefits of using technology in childhood and its connection to adolescent study and career choices. This data could similarly shed light on the transferability of skills to the professional world and how early-age connectivity affects women and girls' integration into the work force. Data is also required to enable better understanding of how a lack of female perspectives in the design and development of technological products impacts the overall user experience of women and girls.

Key recommendations:

- It is crucial to advance leadership opportunities for adolescent girls. Part of this effort should involve engaging boys and men as allies.
- A systemic multi-stakeholder approach, as well as sustainable investment, is required across the tech industry to ensure technology and innovation design and development meets the needs of women and girls. Gender lens criteria should be in place for investment in technological solutions, programmes and innovation policies, including efforts to capture women and girls' voices in the design and testing phases.
- The United Nations has a legitimate, relevant, and timely role to play in fostering systemic approaches, as well as accelerating innovative solutions with a gender lens, with the aim of increasing the market's trust in women-led solutions.