Views & Perspectives on

Gender Rights Online,

For

The Global South

"Redefining Rights for a Gender Inclusive Networked future"

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Executive Summary

The Internet today has been recognized as one of the key enablers to bridge the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'; empowering women, indigenous population and ethnic minorities. While the number of Internet users has been growing significantly, yet significant discrepancies on who can actually access and benefit from it has been observed. In fact, there is a significant difference in the internet penetration between males and females and the gender digital gap is increasing. The existing gender disparities, discrimination and inequalities, especially of people living in the Global South including least developed countries, has considerable impact on the gender digital divide and leading to their digital exclusion.

Understanding the advantages what the Internet can provide, the current move in many countries of the Global South is to digitize all services including citizen centric services, financial services and facilities, to empower the citizens and bring a level playing field. However, since the people who can benefit most, still cannot avail the benefits, the challenge today is to connect people, especially women and create policies to improve the social environment where women can freely access the internet, in their mother tongue or preferred language, watch content which they want, express themselves online without fear of being trolled, get equal opportunities in the technical fields and encouragement to become social entrepreneurs through the generation of business and digital content.

This preliminary study was undertaken to identify the main challenges towards improving the gender access and rights online especially in the Global South; and the best practices which nations or regions have adopted to overcome those challenges; identify the different strains of thoughts, along with their convergence and divergence, review the central issues from the global south perspective, and then attempt to share the areas of public policy or social aspects that need to be addressed along with suggestions, to redefine the rights to nurture an environment for faster development, where women can network freely to help each other.

Apart from studying the secondary sources, indepth opinion of 19 Experts belonging to 15 Developing and Least Developed Countries of Asia Pacific (APAC) and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were sought, based on a detailed subjective questionnaire. The responses received were used to create a fine-tuned questionnaire, that was validated by an external reviewer. Opinion of stakeholders from a targeted network of people exposed to policies across the globe, based on the fine-tuned questionnaire was taken. 162 participants from 54 countries participated in the process.

For further validation, the findings were shared with speakers and participants at the **IGF 2017 workshop "Redefining Rights for a Gender Inclusive Connected Future (WS 102),** which was attended by ~~around~~ 40 participants in person and 5 remotely.

Our study revealed that more than 67% people feel that their country is not completely gender inclusive, where every citizen has equal rights and opportunities irrespective of their genders. They felt most developing nations are halfway there.

The top challenges across the global South hampering the creation of a gender inclusive digital world include existing social and cultural norms in the society about the role of women; low literacy rates due to lack of access and opportunities to education, digital skills and ICT; lack of access to infrastructure, resources, devices and relevant content; lack of comprehensive approach towards women empowerment, including understanding of gender equality and issues and inadequate policy implementation; issues of trust and privacy online; limited access to financial support and opportunities; workplace limitations, few role models and limited platforms to interact and network. Additionally the lack of systemic database and evidence on barriers and enablers to technology, especially related to gender is limiting decision makers from taking a comprehensive view on issues related to gender rights online.

For ensuring gender equality online, especially in the Global South, Policy Reforms; promoting literacy and ICT skills amongst women and encouraging digital literacy is important. Simultaneously, policy reforms for ensuring gender inclusive access to internet; building trust online, including better legislation and enforcement of laws against online harassment; economic incentives to encourage diversity in the workforce, encouraging more engagement amongst women networks, will go a long way in ensuring the Global South nations can realize their aspirations to create a gender inclusive and networked future online.

Government led initiatives and reforms are considered most important for improving gender rights online. Moreover, since under SDG goal 17 all the government policy makers are mandated to include policy related to reduce the gender gap, it is the Government's responsibility to create an enabling environment where the gender gap is reduced. However, the correct implementation and execution of these policy reforms was felt to be more critical. Proactive Initiatives by Business; Awareness & Capacity Building by Civil Society; technical Innovation by the Technical Community are also considered important.

Therefore, for achieving a Gender Inclusive digital Global South. It is imperative that all stakeholders work together. Further there has to be a comprehensive approach and initiatives to solve issues related to gender and encourage their participation both offline and online. Policies should be inclusive of all: women, minorities, ethnic communities, people with disabilities, etc.

Background

While most nations today are working to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)[1] of creating a sustainable and resilient world, yet reports such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report 2016[2] indicates that although average human development, improved significantly across all regions over the last fifteen years, one in three people worldwide still continue to live in low levels of human development. Systemic discrimination against women, indigenous population and ethnic minorities and among other groups, are the barriers which are not allowing them to improve their lives.

The Internet today has been recognized as one of the key enablers to bridge the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' and also for empowering women and girls. The 2030 SDG Goals lays emphasis both on improving access to Information Communication and technology (ICT) and gender equality and empowerment. While the Goal 5 sets targets for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the subsection 5.b emphasizes the use of enabling technology, in particular ICT, to promote the empowerment of women. Further Goal 9c mentions the target for universal and affordable access to ICTs in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by 2020[3] In this context the Affordability Report 2015/2016[4] mentions that while the universal access (goal 9c) and enhancing the use of ICTs to promote the empowerment of women (goal 5b) are separate SDG goals, they are 'inextricably linked'.

The outcome document of the high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the information Society (WSIS) mentioned 'the full participation of women in the information society and women's access to new technologies', and stressed the need for immediate measures to achieve gender equality in Internet users by 2020[5].

However, while the number of Internet users has been growing significantly, yet significant discrepancies on who can actually access and benefit from it has been observed. In fact, there is a significant difference in the Internet penetration between males and females and the gender digital gap is increasing. The ITU Report on ICT Facts and Figures 2016 indicates that the global Internet user gender gap has grown from 11% in 2013 to 12.2% in 2016 and developing nations such as Africa (23%) have a larger access gap than developed nations such as Americas (2%). They had further estimated that by the end of 2016, only one in seven people is expected to

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[1]https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf
[2] http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf
[3]https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf
[4] http://1e8q3q16vyc81g8l3h3md6q5f5e.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/A4AI-2015-16-Affordability-Report.pdf
[5] http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ares70d125_en.pdf

be online from Least Developing Nations (LDCs), of which, only 31% of them would be women.[6]

The existing gender disparities, discrimination and inequalities, especially of people living in the Global South and least developed countries, has considerable impact on the gender digital divide. The Broadband Commission's Working Group on Broadband and Gender[7] (2013) states that the digital inclusion of women will not only benefit women and address aspects of gender equality: social, economic and political, but also their communities and economies.

Analysis of Recent Reports

Some of the recent reports on gender access and rights online, namely the working Group on the Digital Gender at the Broadband Commission For Sustainable Development 2013 and 2017; Resolution of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/32/L.20)[8]; IGF Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Gender: Gender and Access[9] and Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Online Abuse and Gender-Based Violence Against Women[10] while acknowledging the growing digital gender divide online and lack of awareness of women's right, suggest adoption of a more collaborative approach to address the issue and the need to integrate Gender into National ICT policies.

The key recommendations of the report of Broadband Commission published in 2013[11] include the need to integrate Gender into National ICT and Broadband Policies; improve Sex disaggregated ICT Statistics and Measurement; take Steps to Boost the Affordability & Usability of ICT Products and Services; improve Relevant and Local Content Online and launching Action Plan for gender equality in access to broadband by 2020

The key recommendations of the report by the working Group on the Digital Gender at the Broadband Commission published in March 2017[12] include: need to understand the context by supporting data collection and analysis of sex disaggregated data on Internet access and use; Integrate a gender perspective in strategies, policies, plans and budgets; Address barriers including access, affordability, safety, digital skills and relevance; and support stakeholders to collaborate more effectively in addressing digital gender gaps by sharing good practices and lessons learned. Further, the working Group believes that the digital gender divide can only be bridged effectively by coordinated actions.

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[6] http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2016.pdf

[7] http://www.broadbandcommission.org/documents/working-groups/bb-doubling-digital-2013.pdf

[8] https://www.article19.org/data/files/Internet_Statement_Adopted.pdf

[9] http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3406/437

[10] http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/best-practice-forums/623-bpf-online-abuse-and-gbv-against-women/file

[11] http://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/bb-doubling-digital-2013-highlights.pdf

[12] http://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/WorkingGroupDigitalGenderDivide-report2017.pdf

The report of Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Online Abuse and Gender-Based Violence Against Women[13] indicates the lack of awareness about women's rights and the impact of the issue on individuals and communities contribute to an inability to make claims for the fulfilment and enforcement of such rights, and also reinforces the need for awareness, literacy and education programmes, along with more investment in research and statistics on the issue. The report also calls for a better understanding of the rights and interests involved

The Human Rights Council's resolution on the Promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective (A/HRC/32/L.20)[14] while reaffirming that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online" also reiterates the need to adopt a human rights framework especially rights such as equality, non-discrimination, inclusion, participation and the provision of effective remedies , when working on and addressing access, the use, and the misuse of ICTs. But where are the areas of the world most afflicted by lack of basic resources, let alone Internet access, and where this lack directly correlates to the gender digital divide? The Global South is a concept continuosly reviewed in its economic, political and cultural aspects and has as its most emblematic imagine the Brand Line. The line which divides North and South also resulted in a report card analysis and, even after most items have improved, women inclusion remained with a -D category[15].

Objective of the Study

The current move in many countries of the global south is to digitize all services including financial services and facilities, to empower the citizens and bring a level playing field. However to achieve this vision the challenge today is to connect people, especially women and create policies and improve the social environment where women can freely access the internet, in their preferred language, watch content which they want, express themselves online without fear of being trolled, get equal opportunities in the technical fields and encouragement to become social entrepreneurs through the generation of business and digital content.

The objective of the study is to identify the main challenges towards improving the gender access and rights online especially in the Global South; while highlighting issues and the best practices which nations or regions have adopted to overcome those challenges and create a networked environment where people can help each other; identify the different strains of thoughts, along with their convergence and divergence, review the central issues from the global south perspective, and then attempt to share the areas of public policy or social aspects that need to be addressed along with suggestions, to redefine the rights to nurture an environment for faster development.
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[13] http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/best-practice-forums/623-bpf-online-abuse-and-gbv-against-women/file
[14] https://www.article19.org/data/files/Internet_Statement_Adopted.pdf
[15] http://www.brandt21forum.info/

Methodology Used

The aim of this study is to identify the main challenges related to gender rights online, the specific regional or national issues, the different strains of thoughts, along with their convergence and divergence, review the central issues from the Global South perspective, based on the responses of different stakeholder and consultations with them, highlighting the best practices available and make recommendations on areas of public policy or social aspects that need to be addressed along with suggestions, to redefine the rights to nurture an environment for faster development.

The study was conducted over a period of three months.

It involved:
- Identifying and studying the relevant issues from secondary data.

- In-depth study of key issues through study and critique of relevant secondary data such as namely the working Group on the Digital Gender at the Broadband Commission For Sustainable Development 2013 and 2017; Resolution of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/32/L.20)[16]; IGF Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Gender: Gender and Access[17][16] and Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Online Abuse and Gender-Based Violence Against Women[18] as well as Dynamic Coalition of Gender and Internet Governance.[19]

- Seeking the opinion of experts based on an indepth questionnaire and interviews.

  19 experts belonging to 15 Developing and least Developed Countries of Asia Pacific (APAC) and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) participated in the process.The questionnaire along with the list of experts who provided their inputs have been mentioned in the Annexure.

- Based on the responses from experts creating a fine-tuned questionnaire, that was validated by an external reviewers.

- Seeking the opinion of stakeholders from a targeted network of people exposed to policies across the globe, based on the fine-tuned questionnaire. The respondents were contacted through emails, Facebook, Whatsapp group and the CCAOI Newsletter. 162 participants from 54 countries across the globe, responded to the questionnaire, which is available in the Annexure.

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[16] https://www.article19.org/data/files/Internet_Statement_Adopted.pdf

[17] http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3406/437

[18] http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/best-practice-forums/623-bpf-online-abuse-and-gbv-against-women/file

[19] https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/dynamic-coalition-on-gender-and-internet-governance#overlay-context=

In terms of geographical region, 42% respondents were from Asia Pacific (APAC), 26% were from Africa, over 16% were from Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), 10% were from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); 3% from Europe and 2% from North America (NA).
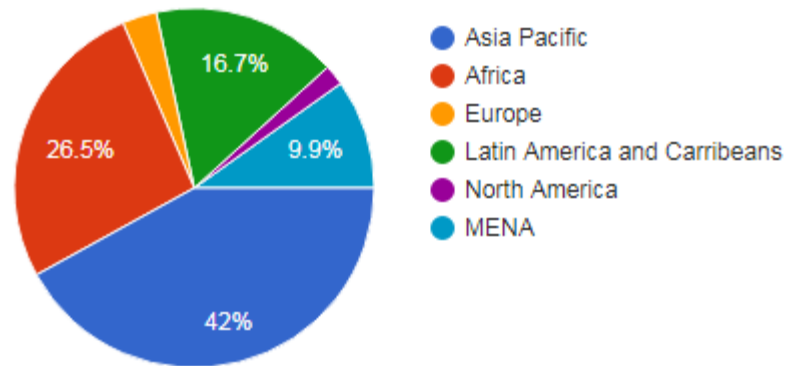
Fig: Regionwise Responses Received

In terms of **Age**,: 4.4% of the respondents were under 20 years; 44% were between the age group of 20-30 years; 24% were between 30-40 years; 15% were within 40-50 years and 12% were above the age group of 50 years.
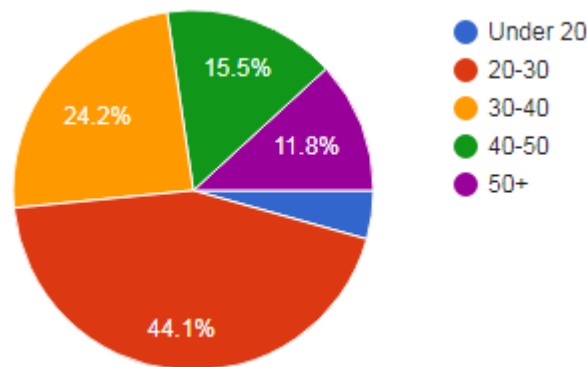
Fig: Agewise Responses Received

In terms of **Gender**, 66.5% of the respondents were females., 39% were males and the balance .5% did not want to share their gender.

Female
66.5%

Male
33.5%
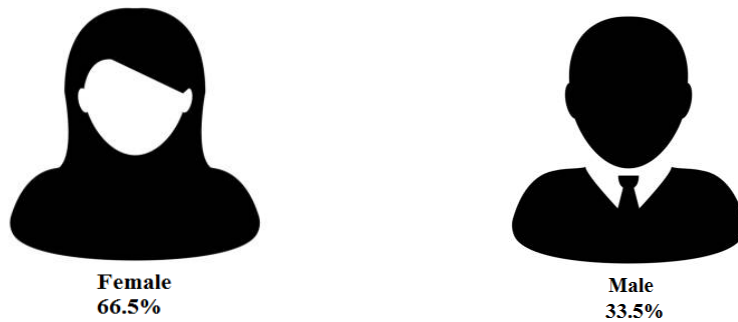
Fig: Gender wise Responses Received

In terms of the **stakeholder community**, 31% respondents were from Civil Society; 20% from Technical Community; 17% were Students; 13% from Academia; 9% from Business; 5% Government; 19% from End user community; 2% from Intergovernmental & International Organization; and 1% from media..
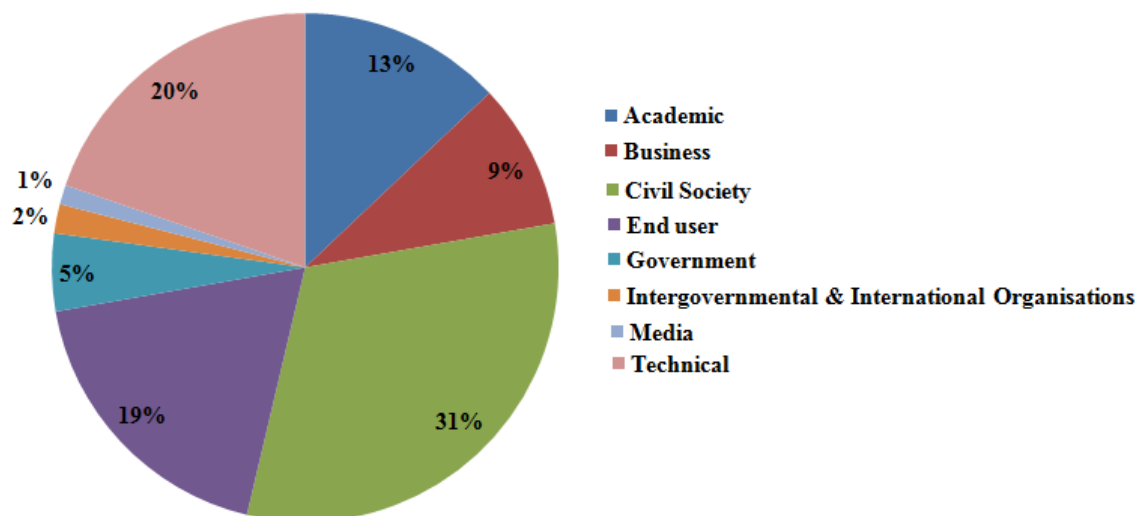
Fig: Stateholder wise representation of Responses Received

Validation and consolidation of results. The responses of the study were consolidated and shared with speakers and participants at the IGF2017 Workshop 102: **Redefining Rights for a Gender Inclusive Networked Future**, for futher validation. The session was attended by 40 participants in person and 5 remotely, 85% were women.

Picture: From the Workshop

Picture: Few Particpants at the Workshop

This study has limitations. This is a snapshot of a period of time and it has a more generalized view towards gender. It must be distinguished from long term research and more granular analysis into the concept of gender.

If provided an opportunity, as a next step, we plan to do an in-depth study on the subject as the topic needs further investigation .

Summary of Responses

Response related to challenges across the Global South

**More than half (67%) the respondents believe that they do not live in a gender inclusive country where every citizen has equal rights and opportunities irrespective of their genders**. However, 20% respondents believe their country provides equal rights and opportunities to all; 9% feel that their countries may be providing equal rights and opportunities to all; 4% believe that in some context their countries offer equal rights and opportunities, while in others they do not and 1% has never thought about it.
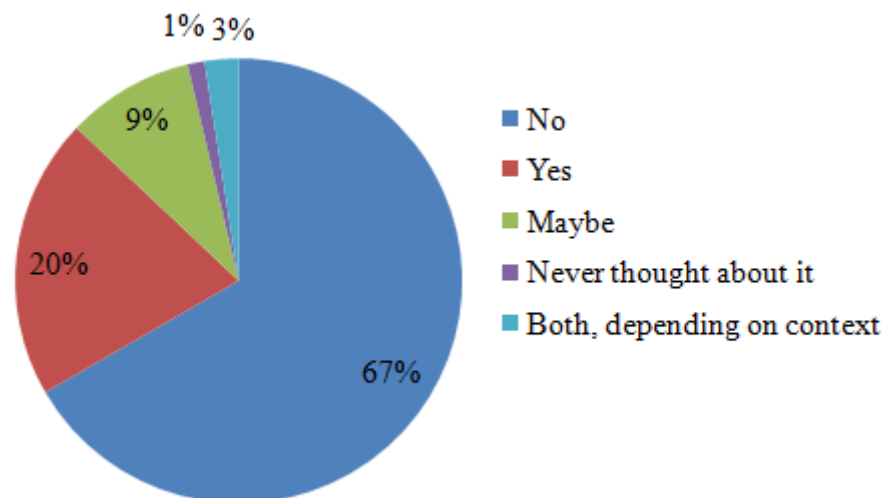
Fig: Perception related to gender inclusiveness in the country of the Respondent

The existing top challenges across the Global South in creating a gender inclusive digital world, the respondents perceived were:

Socio-Cultural Challenges

- Patriarchal mindset and social attitudes about gender roles which leads women to take on the bulk of household chores and childcare responsibilities. As a result, women have a smaller role in the connected networked world and lack of time to use the internet as they are saddled by household chores.
- Attitudinal barriers in the society towards women using mobiles, Internet, or social media and marginalization of women. This prevents many women from the global south, from

owning their personal devices, and even when they do, they are subjected to an invasion for their privacy from those around them;

- Lack of awareness on the importance of the Internet and being connected. In some rural areas and very closed communities Internet is considered to be a tool of entertainment and a waste of time and this wrong perception leads to a very closed way to deal with Internet by the parents for example and so their sons and daughters "specially daughters" are not allowed to use it.
- Lack of comprehensive approach for empowerment of women and main streaming them with same opportunities like their male colleagues.
- With global migration and displacement of people looking for better living and jobs, women must either follow their husbands' career, or must stay behind in order to take care of aging parents and other social duties. Therefore, in some cases woman is heavier to move around borders.
- A respondent observed that there are patriarchy and hierarchy within issues being raised and many times voices are politically motivated. For example, often it is cases of criminalisation of political speech that are given priority rather than issues related to Freedom of Expression (FoE), of women, people with disabilities or minorities. Also for indigenous people, without a mastery of English it is hard for them to articulate their issues in ways that will be recognised by the government or the public to be taken up properly.

Issues of Literacy, Digital Skills & Resources

- Low literacy rates due to lack of access to education.
- Less girls taking up.Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) subjects, or lack of interest in STEM subjects which hinders girls critical thinking skills -skills necessary for 21 century jobs.
- Lack of knowledge and skills related to the internet and internet-related employment opportunities, due to lack of access to the technology know-how (many women do not know how to use devices).
- Lack of digital literacy among women and girls. Women and girls often have fewer digital skills.
- A respondent added that digital literacy has been a challenge. While running a digital literacy programs, the respondent observed very low participation from women. The respondent reasons that it could be due to the male-dominant traditional classroom environment that does not allow women to participate and contribute in these literacy programs.

Challenges related to Access

- Access to resources, due to education, Internet, culture and religion
- Access to infrastructure in terms of Internet connectivity in rural area and conflict zones.
- Lack of infrastructure in terms of places to access, cost of access, access to devices and availability of quality connection.

- Lack of access to safe public access. While accessing from a cyber cafe is easier by males and more acceptable for the community, especially in insecure situations, it is not so with women.
- Limited accessibility and content in local language and relevant content for women in local language.

Lack of understanding of Gender Equality and inadequate Gender based Policies and Strategies

- Lack of understanding of the concept and knowledge about gender equality
- Lack of acknowledgement of gender equality by governments and other authorities to empower women in their homes, workplace and society
- Limitation of government rules and regulations and inadequate policy implementations
- Lack of gender based policy and strategies;

A respondent shared that presently a narrow approach on digital divide framework has been adopted. The approach that is taken to reduce inequalities in access and use of digital technology are limited to the provision of infrastructure while ignoring the social context of technology. Digital technology is embedded in complex array of factors encompassing physical, social, economic and cultural dimensions, hence access to technology also becomes multidimensional in nature and needs to be understood in the way technology is perceived, received and is adopted by the people. Gender is a significant such factor driving the digital divide and a comprehensive approach is needed to address this divide.

Economic Issues

- Economic hardships making jobs hard to be created and hard to get. Women are perceived as taking away jobs from men who need them more in order to cater for their family duties.
- Financial limitation as most women are not financially independent.
- Lack of economic access: women often do not have the means to access technology given complex economic forces that often exclude them from paid employment and resources.
- Lack of effective financing policies for women entrepreneurs in the digital domain to support them financially and technically to encourage them to start a sustainable online business.

Workplace gender equality Issues

- Lack of gender equality in the workplace. Women do not get the same pay or conditions of work as men, although they may have similar skills or be even more qualified than the men in their workplace
- Workplace limitations for women towards their career growth

Issues of Trust and Privacy online

- Privacy online has been cited as a challenge especially since the telecom companies and government have not been able to protect individuals identity online.
- Cybercrime, cyber bullying and violence-towards-women-online is a growing challenge and many women in rural areas are not yet ready to adopt the new technology. Internet has made stalking, bullying, harassing a lot easier and there has been cases of pictures and videos of women in remote villages being shared online with the rest of the country. .This challenge will create the challenge of trust as the access grows. Such issues of online harassment often drive women away from such networked spaces given that they are attacked and subjected to online violence.

Lack of Role Models

- Lack of women in the tech industry and decision-making positions is harming the cause of women. A respondent added that if there were more women parliament there would be higher chances to change the legislation and to give greater empowerment to women as their right.
- Lack of self confidence is another barrier which prevents women from taking up leadership roles.
- Lack of groups or networks where women can interact, exchange ideas, collaborate, mentor or get mentored.

Relevance of the content:

- It was pointed out that many times, women do not see the relevance and usefulness of the internet in their lives.

Inadequate research to base evidence on

- Due to lack of systematic data base and evidence from research on barriers and enablers for technology from the bottom up perspective including advantages of networked community

Response on Best Practices adopted by Nations

On the question related to being aware of any best practices adopted by their country to promote a gender inclusive digital future, 34% respondents mentioned there were best practices being adopted by their country, 27% were not aware, 31% respondents mentioned none while 7% refrained from commenting.
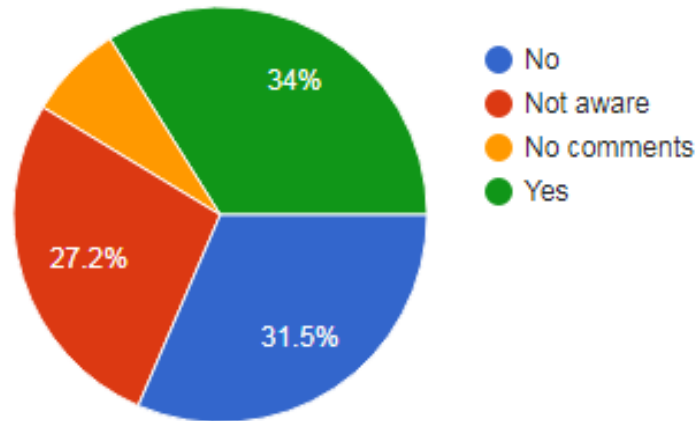
Fig: Awareness of Best Practices adopted in their country to create a Gender inclusive digital Future

Examples of Best Practices shared:

The best practices adopted by nations for promoting a gender inclusive digital future, which the respondents mentioned, have been shared below country wise:

- In Afghanistan shared that state owned universities have allocated 30% seats to female students in all subjects including IT, women empowerment and women's enterprise development programs.

  Various civil societies and organisations involved in social work have undertaking social activities in this field and cited the examples of NITPAA[20] which holds events related to ICT and Internet Governance capacity building session, ensuring and encouraging women participation not only as participants, but as speakers and trainers; Freshta Frogh her coding school; Techwomen[21]; Roya Mahboob, and promote from USAID[22].

  Besides, in Afghanistan institutions such as the libraries at universities, Lincoln center by the US embassy and innovation hubs are playing an important role in providing a gender equal environment for all.

- In Armenia, the Government adopted Gender Policy Concept Paper in 2010 and accordingly Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan was adopted in 2011. The Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities between Men and Women received the parliament's approval in May 2013. According to the concept paper[23]: "The Gender

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[20] http://nitpaa.org.af/
[21] http://techwomen.af/
[22] https://www.usaid.gov/
[23] http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw55/statements/Armenia.pdf

Policy will be implemented by introducing gender criteria in all spheres of socioeconomic and political life, and by developing special programs and the means to overcome the gender imbalance and widen women's opportunities".

- In Brazil shared there are laws for violence against women. There are incentives for women business and some incentives for the political career for women.

  Also, Bytegirl[24], Marialab[25], Pretalab[26] and Poligen are among the initiatives to recruit women in universities to be coders and entrepreneurs in technology, with a social conscience.

- In Croatia associations are working in collaboration with government institutions.

- In the Dominican Republic, there have been various programs that promote the inclusion of more women in ICT along with mentoring sessions.

- A respondent from Fiji preferred to use the term 'good practices' and elaborated that there has been a few good practices in regional and International context. Projects undertaken by organisations such as Pacific Community (SPC)[27]clearly highlight gender inclusive digital future.

- In Ghana, there is now a ministry of Gender and child protection is given the responsibility to oversee these issues. This is expected to mean an avenue for one to be heard. Women empowerment is key.

- In Grenada, some government funded project targeted women entrepreneurs to receive grant funding to start up or grow ICT's businesses. Also trained a number of women in ICT related courses.

- In India, the social norms as well as the attitudinal behavior of the society has been changing to a certain extent (but not completely) due to the continuing efforts of the governments. There are many projects and schemes initiated by the Govt. towards gender inclusivity in the areas of sports, education, digital literacy such as the Sarvasikhshya Abhiyaan[28]; Beti Padaobeti Bachao[29]; Digital India[30] and Skill India[31] initiatives. Besides state governments have also initiated various schemes such as Kanyashree[32], a program by Government of West Bengal to bring about Gender inclusiveness.

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[24] http://bytegirl.com.br/

[25] https://marialab.org/

[26] http://pretalab.com/

[27] http://www.spc.int/

[28] http://ssashagun.nic.in/

[29] https://www.mygov.in/group/beti-bachao-beti-padhao-0/

[30] http://www.digitalindia.gov.in/

[31] http://www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/pmkvy.html

[32] https://www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_4.0/index.php

Further initiatives such as the National broadband program to connect India by 2020 including the BharathNet[33] -National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) initiative to connect rural areas, E-kranti, providing wifi in all Universities etc.

To make sure that Women of the Indian society become aware of their rights, the Government runs certain advertisements as well as do organise various on-site visits to certain villages.

There have been various civil society initiatives and Civil Society Organization working with rural and underprivileged girl students and for senior citizens, has been providing training sessions for them and is serving the society to enhance Digital Literacy and Financial Literacy; Internet Saathi[34] etc.

Further conferences such as Grace Hopper Conference (GHC) held by Anita Borg Institute[35] is encouraging women in technology to come together, mentor and encourage women to take up STEM studies and technology related jobs.

- In Indonesia, there are programs that unite technology activities to traditional culture.

- One of the agenda of Kenya's Vision 2030[36] is to ensure gender equality. They also conducted the 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women".

  Other initiatives include sponsoring female only inclusive tech hubs and the laws passed that require women representation in parliament.

  There are several initiatives that help the promotion of digital literacy of all women from all backgrounds. The country has a Women's rep political position for each county along with the implementation of the 2/3 gender rule. Where not more than two thirds can be of the same gender

- In Kenya and Ghana: Corporates such as Intel have programs that reach out to women (the marginalized gender). There are civil groups that protect human rights(both genders) and some of the thing they do is empower members with education.

- In the MENA region, Qatar and Jordan are leading the region in education initiatives that are inclusive of both girls and boys.

  In Lebanon there are many initiatives in Lebanon and in the MENA region such as Girls Got IT[37].

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[33] http://bharatnet.net/
[34] https://www.google.com/intl/en/about/values-in-action/internet-saathi/
[35] https://ghcindia.anitab.org/
[36] http://www.vision2030.go.ke/
[37] http://www.girlsgotit.org/

A responded noted that a higher degree of personal freedom leads to more women in the workforce and cited the example of Lebanon, which has the highest percentage of women in the workforce (25%) in the MENA region, since the country provides a high degree of personal freedom to their women.

- In Nepal, reservation and quota system is given for minority groups in the government posts and leadership opportunity.

- The Nigeria National Broadband Plan[38] (2013-2018) has plans to close the gender gap in ICT for their country and for that they commit to:monitor the number of women without access to the internet; provide incentives for private educational centers and CSOs to train ore women in the use of the Internet; have dedicated centers at local government headquarters to serve as safe technology access centers for women; and, provide courses on safe use of the Internet for girls. There is a Thirty Percent Affirmative Action on Women inclusiveness in policies.

- Pacific region has received $30 million from the Australian government to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment, and to deal with violence against women. which they recognised as a serious issue in some areas of the Pacific.

  The Pacific Disability Forum has launched several initiatives to encourage women with disabilities in ICT.

- In Pakistan there have been legislative reforms to protect gender rights online against harassment, identity or data theft and other forms of discrimination.

  In Pakistan many gender inclusive networks are working on Violence Against Women (VAW) and few are talking on women digital rights, however, this discussion is bit isolated and limited to networked women members so far.

  Couple of women's digital right's defenders networks are working in Punjab (Pakistan). So far they have member (all women) who meet up and share information, articles, links, news and queries regarding safe internet use.

- In Palestine there is a number of social initiatives and interventions that are tailored for school students. These programs are usually extra-curriculars that seek to educate about school students relevant topics.

- Philippines has one of the highest number of women in both government and the private business sector, as they are recognized for their special talents of empathy, intuition, cool headedness, etc.

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[38] https://www.researchictafrica.net/countries/nigeria/Nigeria_National_Broadband_Plan_2013-2018.pdf

- The Internet Society Sri Lanka chapter, which is working to address some of the identified key issues along with ICTA and women and child affairs ministry in the country.

- In Scandinavian countries, men grant significant paternity leave, which in turn allows mothers to return to the work force earlier.

- The Singapore government runs social programmes such as the "Dads for Life[39]" programme to encourage men to play a bigger role in child rearing and promote the role of fathers.

- South Africa has Employment Equity. The Telecommunication Act (1999) has provision to redress gender disparities and other areas of disadvantage

- South Korea has established an ICT policy towards gender equality in its basic plan for Women's informatization (2002-2006)[40]

- In Sudan, though not specific to the digital inclusion, the culture in many areas is supportive for gender equality. There is some deterioration compared to the 70s and 80s but the aspects are still available with weaker concentration.

- The Gambia, has Girls in ICT related initiatives in our country, also female engineers called GamChix[41] who work to encourage and empower more girl's participation in the ICT sector.
  Capacity building and sensitization of women's rights and empowerment. Also the setting up of Women Bureau, which acts as a Ministry of women affairs.

- In Uganda, there are organisations set up dealing with gender related issues and gender courses are being taught in universities.

- A responded also pointed that in developed nations, there numerous free community development centres to provide access to the Internet, learning opportunities, and networking.

- In Yemen, the Internet Society Yemen's initiative called Internet in My School has setup connection points in boys and girls schools in certain areas of Yemen.
  YODET, another project implemented by a civil society has created a free space for students, enterpreneurs, or activists to access a free internet and free electricity in some cities in Yemen where people could not afford electricity after the power cut since August 2015.

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[39] http://dadsforlife.sg/
[40] http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/EGMFinalReport.pdf
[41] https://www.facebook.com/gamchix1/

- Association for Progressive Communication's[42] membership system, COMANGO[43] (Coalition of Malaysian NGOs in the Universal Periodic Review Process), JAG[44] (Joint Action Group for Gender Equality) are some examples of initiatives for promoting gender inclusiveness. However the respondent, point out that the common element is that they are led by strong female figures who actively pursue mainstream gender equality/inclusiveness, not just as an issue, but in the process too.

- The Take Back Technology is an initiative which supports women to help deal with online crime and violence against women.

- Organizations doing targeted research with gender disaggregated data are also going a long way in highlighting the gender divide and devising data-driven policies to address it.

- A respondent opined that countries in which online harassment is taken seriously, more women get encouraged to become part of the online spaces. Another respondent suggesting having dedicated funding for women-led startups

While most government initiatives are implemented to ensure the greater betterment of all the citizens, the initiatives implemented by organizations and civil societies is mostly aimed towards capacity building but most of them indirectly creates communities or networks where members can collaborate together for their betterment.

Response on what are the top policy areas which need reforms to create a gender networked future

On the question related to listing the top policy areas which need reforms for creating a gender inclusive digital future, responded suggested:

Better Policies to reduce the Gender Gap:

- Under SDG goal 17 all the government policy makers should include policy related to reduce the gender gap.

- Defining Equality: Equality should be defined in equal terms: equal opportunity for all sexes; opportunity of voicing issues and problem should be given to minority groups; basic rights and its practice should be ensured at all levels.

Encourage literacy, especially amongst women

- A respondent shared that policy changes at Government level is required to remove the socio-cultural barriers, which is keeping women at bay. Specific strategies should be

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[42] https://www.apc.org/
[43] https://empowermalaysia.org/allies/comango/
[44] http://www.wao.org.my/Joint+Action+Group+(JAG)_73_5_1.htm

incorporated in the ICT policies to address the gender divide. Citing the example of India, the respondent added that, while there are policies to promote digital access, the policies do not mention how it aims to serve the marginal groups including women with regard to digital empowerment. Further the ICT policies and women's empowerment strategies of the government, various private and public institutions including CSR and NGOs need convergence.

- Another respondent suggested adopting a more participatory-learning oriented approach to all process, and actively acknowledge that everyone has something new to learn, no matter how experienced a person is. All voices, even if it is the minority, must be considered equally and there should be openness and transparency in decision making.

- Inclusive Policy to improve Access to Connectivity

- Improving Digital Access especially for women who are residing in remote provinces and areas of the country, persons with disabilities, indigenous women.

- More affordable internet so that women can take advantage of the economic opportunities available to them via the internet. A respondent shared that Arab women in rural areas face major obstacles mainly the lack of infrastructure, tools and political engagement and ICTs can help these women access and exchange knowledge and expertise.

- Another respondent shared that at the policy level, the focus now should move to meaningful access. Policy makers should take into consideration the soft components of ICT expansion and carry out activities to create enabling atmosphere for women's digital empowerment. These spaces for women would allow them to participate and reflect on solving the issues at the local level to feed and reflect in to the policies and creating local context specific solutions.

Promoting Digital Literacy and skills and STEM Education by reforming the education policy.

- Digital Literacy and skills should be part of the school curriculum.

- A respondent added that it is not enough to provide women with access. They should also know how to navigate the web and make it useful for them. There are many opportunities that women can get by being connected, and this includes being able to express oneself online. Women can also be content creators/developers.

- Encourage the taking of STEM subjects for both girls and boys and especially girls

- More opportunities for upskilling women in the use of technology for sustainable employment and business opportunities.

- Capacity building and develop outreach materials about Internet for the school curriculum;

- For a networked future, Women organizations should help in educating women on Internet and its uses in entrepreneurship and work.

Policy leading to legislation (and effective enforcement) against online harassment of women

- Better laws and enforcement of laws regarding online violence against women.

- Ensure the laws are made known to the public. There should be easier access to justice for women harassed online while law enforcers, prosecutors and judges should also be gender-sensitive and knowledgeable about ICTs.

- Draft Community guidelines of devices and platforms that are part of the social internet need to recognize online harassment;

- Laws protecting the rights of women and children online.

- There should be national and international policies and strategies for online-protection and safety to encourage a safe inclusive networked future.

- A social worker working in remote area of Assam, India, suggested creating of e-forums for survivors of violence to exchange, discuss and encourage others.

Safe and gender friendly workspace policy

- Ensure gender equality in the workplace and ensure a safe and friendly work environment.

Policies to encourage more gender diversity in workplace

- Encourage women entrepreneurs in the digital space.

- Provide government incentives, Tax incentives

- More opportunities for upskilling women in the use of technology for sustainable employment and business opportunities

- Gender inclusive e-commerce policies

- Encourage professional women associations. There should be more women to women mentoring and support programs.

Collaboration among women was also felt to be important. There should be provision of an open, collaborative platform where women can share and learn from each other, in order to encourage women to come online, work and not leave their jobs mid way.

- Giving due acknowledgement to local communities running grass root initiatives.

Policies to encourage content in local language

- A respondent shared that linguistic barriers are especially important to cross in multilingual countries like India.

Respondents considered Government initiatives and reforms, most important for improving gender rights for the digital future. While Proactive Initiatives by business; Awareness & Capacity Building of Civil Society and Promoting Digital and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Education are also considered important.

While responding to the question on their perception on how far do they think the Global South nations are from creating a gender inclusive digital future, nearly 40% respondents felt that these nations are half way there; while 31% felt they are far away. 13% feel they are very far away; another 13% we are somewhere there while balance 3.5% feel these nations have achieved their objective.
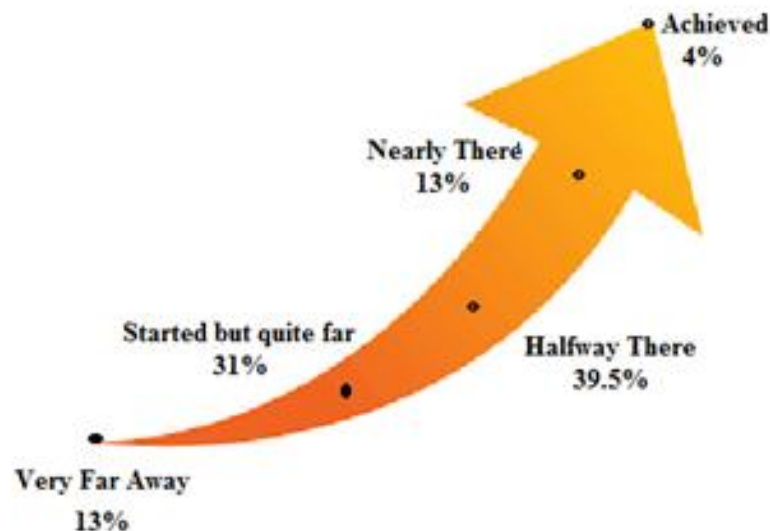
Fig: Perception of how far Global South is from a Gender Inclusive Digital Future

Conclusion

As a part of the SDG goals, a lot has been done in the recent times by nations, especially from the Global South to improve human development, including improving gender inclusion in the digital world. Various initiatives have been undertaken both in large and small scale by nations such as Digital India Program by Government of India; Kenya Vision 2030; Business Internet Sathi; and Civil Societies such as ByteGirl, Girls Got IT from Global South the improve the gender digital inclusion.

While these initiatives are laudable, still more needs to be done to ensure women, the disabled, indigenous groups and ethnic minorities even in the remotest locations of the globe are provided with equal rights and access both offline as well as online; especially since there are fewer women online as compared to men and the gender divide has been increasing substantially. This systemic alienation of women in the Global South, can be attributed to various causes such as the existing social and cultural norms in the society about the role of women; low literacy rates due to lack of access and opportunities to education, digital skills and ICT; lack of access to infrastructure, resources, devices and relevant content; lack of comprehensive approach towards women empowerment, including understanding of gender equality and issues and inadequate policy implementation; issues of trust and privacy online; limited access to financial support and opportunities; workplace limitations and few role models. Additionally the lack of systemic database and evidence on barriers and enablers to technology, especially related to gender and from the bottom up perspective is limiting decision makers from taking a comprehensive view on issues related to gender rights online.

For resolving the existing inconsistencies related to ensure gender equality online, policy reforms related to gender empowerment and gender equality; promoting literacy and ICT skills amongst women and encouraging digital literacy is important. Further, a comprehensive approach and initiatives to solve issues related to gender and encourage their participation both offline and online is much required. Simultaneously, policy reforms for ensuring gender inclusive access to internet; building trust online, including better legislation and enforcement of laws against online harassment; economic incentives to encourage diversity in the workforce, creating environment where women can collaborate, will go a long way in ensuring the Global South nations can realize their aspirations to create a gender inclusive future online. Further, it is important to include men in the gender discussions, as men can be allies to help improve the circumstances

While the role of Governments for rolling out initiatives and reforms is very critical, especially to create the right environment; the role of the Business community to introduce Proactive Initiatives; Technical Community to innovate; Civil Society to create Awareness & Capacity Building are also considered important. Therefore, for achieving a Gender Neutral digital Global South. It is imperative that all stakeholders work together.

Annexure

Abbreviations

A4AI	Alliance for Affordable Internet
APC	Association for Progressive Communications
ICT	Information and communication technology
IGF BPF	Internet Governance Forum Best Practice Forum
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals (UN)
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USOF	Universal Service Obligatory Fund

Questionnaires

Questionnaire for Experts

Request if you could share some of your perspectives on the following questions highlighting your country's perspectives and also on the global south regarding.

1. What are the top five existing challenges across the global south in creating a gender inclusive networked future and are any of these unique to your country?

2. Are you aware of any best practices adopted by any nation or region to promote a gender inclusive networked future?

3. What do you think are the top three policy areas which need reforms to create a gender inclusive networked future?

4. Any additional comments.

General Questionnaire

Views and Perspectives on Gender Rights Online for the Global South

We are organising a Bird Of Feather (BOF) session @IGF 2017 on "Redefining Gender Rights in the Global South for the Digital Future" (Workshop 102). In that context, we seek your views and perspectives on the questions listed below, highlighting your country's and that of the Developing & Less Developing Nations perspective. Your valuable inputs would help us to identify and highlight relevant issues and perspectives more effectively. We request if you could submit your responses by 26 Nov, 2017

*   Required

1) Email (optional)
2) Name (optional)
3) Country
4) Region *
   - Asia Pacific
   - Africa
   - Europe

- Latin America and Carribeans
- North America
- MENA

5) Age (Optional) Mark only one oval.

- Under 20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50+

6) Gender

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefers not to say

7) Stakeholder Community * Mark only one oval.

- Civil Society
- Business
- Government
- Academic
- Technical
- Student
- Others

8) Do you believe you live in a gender inclusive country, where every citizen has equal rights and opportunities irrespective of their genders?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Never thought about it
- Others

8.1) If your response is "No", can you choose from the list below the top "5" challenges which is hindering your country from being gender inclusive?

- Social Norms
- Attitudinal Barriers
- No access to internet

- High cost of Internet access
- Lack of know how
- Lack of economic access
- Lack of Employment opportunities
- Other

9) Are you aware of any best practices adopted by your country to promote a gender inclusive digital future?
Mark only one oval.

- No
- Not aware
- No comments
- Yes

9.1) If your response to the above question is "Yes", please elaborate

10) Are you aware of any best practices adopted by any other nation or region to promote a gender inclusive digital future?

- Yes
- No
- Not aware
- No comments

10.1) If your response to the above question was "Yes", please elaborate

11) Please rank in terms of priority the suggested policy areas which need reforms, to improve gender rights in the digital future.
     1st priority 2nd priority 3rd priority 4th priority 5th priority

- Encourage Digital Literacy and
- Skills
- Women Empowerment
- Inclusive Access to Internet
- Protecting Rights Online
- Tax Incentives to Encourage
- Diversity in the Digital Workforce
- Others

11.1) If your response was "Others", please elaborate.

12) For improving gender rights for the digital future, from the below listed initiatives, what do you think should be of importance?

Very Important   Important   Less Important   Not at all Important   No comments

· Government Initiatives &Reforms
· Proactive Initiatives by Business
· Awareness & Capacity Building by Civil Society
· Promoting Digital and STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Education
· Others

17.   13) In a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "Very Far" and 5 being "We are There"), how far do you think the Global South nations are from creating a gender inclusive digital future? *
Mark only one oval.

1   2   3   4   5
Very Far   We are There

About the Authors

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Amrita serves as the Director of CCAOI, Treasurer of of Internet Society India, Delhi Chapter and APAC Lead of SIG Women. Besides, she is also part of the organizing team of the India School of Internet Governance (inSIG)

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Besides being a student of Public Policy and Regulations, Amrita has certificates in Internet Governance and Advanced Phased Certification at Security from Diplo Foundation. She has a 6sigma black belt certification and holds a Post Graduate degree in Management.

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