



## **How Can Technology Be Used to Empower and Create Equal Opportunities for Young Women?**

Achieving gender equality is not about degendering males or superimposing women above men. It is rather about shedding centuries-old deep-rooted gender imbalances whose impacts are still felt today. The world could have been a better place if women in ancient Greece were permitted to take part in decision-making. Again, it could have been a better world if women had titles to land in the days old. Even in modern days, women still struggle to have allodial titles to lands and properties. The world could have also been far better if women had civil and political rights and did not have to protest and declare their sentiments and resolutions. When women had stood up, the course of history changed for the better. Women like Catherine the Great, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen Elizabeth I & II, Susan B. Anthony, Rosa Parks, Marie Curie, and many others have made significant contributions to human civilization. In modern African history, women like Queen Nanny of Jamaica, Yaa Asantewaa, Miriam Makeba, Wangari, Maathai, and Winnie Mandela became the wind of change that we still enjoy today.

Since women celebrated the past and planned for the future in 1996, each year's celebration of International Women's Day has inched women all over the world closer to achieving gender equality. From the Millennium Development Goal 3 to Sustainable Development Goal 5, promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls have seen significant progress. Yet, progress is ever than before threatened with more complex and unique challenges. The recent covid-19 health crises and disruptions in education have eroded the gains made in achieving gender equality and exacerbated gender disparities even further. Job losses and reduced working hours due to supply chain interruptions have disproportionately impacted women. During the lockdowns, women took on a larger share of unpaid care work. This has furthermore worsened income inequality and slowed progress toward gender equality.

Moreover, the Russian-Ukrainian war has had a significant impact on gender equality. Women have suffered disproportionately as a result of the conflict, with increased risks of trafficking, gender-based violence, loss of livelihoods, and rising poverty. The war has also hampered women's access to healthcare, education, and other critical services. This year's theme, "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality," could not have been delayed and has arrived right on time. How can technology empower and create equal opportunities for young women?

Technology has played a tremendous role in bridging the gender gap. Online learning platforms have given girls access to education in places where traditional schooling is not available. Women are using social media and other online platforms as powerful tools for advocacy and activism. These platforms are used to share stories, raise awareness about gender inequality, and mobilize support for change. Health technology has improved women's access to high-quality healthcare. CT scans, for example, have helped women avoid prenatal, antenatal, and postnatal complications. Maternal mortality which is most widespread among rural women has been reduced through telehealth technologies which have improved access to healthcare for women who live in remote or underserved areas. It has also helped to reduce disparities in the state of maternal health and enhanced women's and girls' overall health. Menstrual health and hygienic mobile applications have increased awareness and preparedness. There is however the problem of 'period poverty' caused by the incessant levy of obnoxious taxes on sanitary products. This is deliberately created and could be solved by the removal of such taxes and to a larger extent making sanitary products affordable and accessible.

Remote work technologies like business apps, video conferencing and cloud computing have given women more flexibility in balancing work and family obligations. This has helped to reduce the gender pay gap by allowing more women to enter the workforce. Furthermore, mobile banking and digital financial services have increased women's access to financial resources, allowing them to start businesses or invest in their education.

Certainly, technology has the potential to be an extremely effective tool in advancing gender equality. However, efforts must be made to ensure that these technologies are accessible, effective, and safe for all women and girls. Many women and girls face unique challenges when it comes to technology. Most importantly, access is limited due to a variety of factors including poverty, lack of education, and cultural norms that discourage women from using technology. Even if women have access to technology, they may lack the skills and knowledge required to effectively use it, as the available data suggests. This limits their ability to benefit from technological advancements. They are also vulnerable to cyberbullying and online harassment and gender-biased technology. Cyberbullying has been a major challenge to using technology for transformational leadership skills. Online harassment and trolls often targeted at women have caused many of them to coil. This has silenced many others who found their voices online in an attempt to escape such ordeals. This has resulted in the underrepresentation of women leaders and mentors on social media and networking sites.

According to research, "affinity bias," or the tendency for people to hire those who are similar to themselves, can also be a problem. Affinity bias is the tendency for people to prefer those who are similar to them. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including hiring decisions in which people may unconsciously prefer candidates with similar backgrounds or experiences. Affinity bias can be problematic in the context of women-led technology platforms because it can lead to a lack of diversity and inclusion. Organizations can work to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace by recognizing and addressing affinity bias. Aside from affinity bias, women in technology face several additional challenges. One of the most difficult challenges is being taken seriously because of gender perception. This means that women may not be perceived as competent or knowledgeable as men simply because of their gender. Other reasons are equal pay and benefits. Women in technology frequently do not receive the same pay and benefits as men for doing the same job. We can therefore promote greater penetration of both general and women-

inspired technology platforms and resources through training, recruiting, retaining, and promoting women in technology.

Blockchain technology can empower and create equal opportunities for women due to its secure and transparent nature. Because of its interconnectedness, it is more equitable and inclusive, and because of its decentralized system and anonymity, it is application-neutral. It does not require profiling features that perpetuate gender norms. According to studies, blockchain has the potential to open up the financial system, increase people's responsibility by including the most marginalized subjects in economic infrastructure, and ensure proper resource-tracking procedures. Thus, by controlling the use of resources and performing essential humanitarian and social functions, blockchain applications can improve the living conditions of disadvantaged individuals. It has been proven by the UN that blockchain technology can mitigate inequalities.

Additionally, in the area of gender-based violence, technology such as affective internet of things (AIoT) can be used as a combat force. The concept of AIoT is where intelligent objects are given the capacity to imitate human-like emotions and personality. This implies that each intelligent object can have a distinct emotional state and be linked to a particular personality. This strategy, which primarily makes use of robots' appearance, is already in use in the field of social robotics. Examples include innovations such as VioGen, ATENPRO and Cometa. There is also the experimental Bindi (bracelet and pendant). This is an end-to-end autonomous multimodal system that uses artificial intelligence techniques to automatically recognize dangerous situations based on sensing emotions connected to fear and, if necessary, initiate a protective strategy. Standards, regulations, and scalability remain critical challenges of AIoT that need to be resolved.

Lastly, many technologies are designed without taking into account the needs and viewpoints of women. As a result, services and solutions that do not meet the needs of women or reinforce gender norms may be produced. It is, therefore, needful to draw attention to inclusive and gender-based technology. For instance, in exploring the challenges and opportunities of virtual reality, Olivia Lee of Stanford University discovered that the technology promotes harassment towards women and other minority groups whereas the hardware better suits males than females. She proposed that VR applications can be empathetic towards marginalised groups with the headset being more sex inclusive.

In conclusion, achieving gender equality through technology requires all stakeholders to play their part. Government should enhance and broaden its communications and digitalisation policies; the private sector should invest in research and technologies that enhance gender equality; and individuals must respect diversity.

**Agness Peprah Ankomah**  
**University of Education, Winneba**  
**Department of Political Science**

Email: [ankomahagness@gmail.com](mailto:ankomahagness@gmail.com)

Mobile: +233 059 756 902