A CIVIL SOCIETY POSITION PAPER

PROMOTING SMART POLICY OPTIONS IN CLOSING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

This position paper is primarily a result of two multi-stakeholder convenings of the Civil Society Organizations, on how to bridge the gender digital gap in Uganda. It brings forward the argument that access alone is not enough; women need agency and capacity to leverage access. The paper thus highlights the increasing significance of making assessments of the gender digital gap in Uganda and develop meaningful indicators that contribute to the design and implementation of effective policies that drive adoption. It highlights the need for effective promotion of women's digital adoption not only from the government but also from the private sector and civil society in order to lead the digital adoption of best practices for women in Uganda. In other words, this paper reflects the position of the civil society on the smart policy options necessary in closing the gender digital gap in Uganda.

List of Acronym

AU: African Union

CEDAW: Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against
Women

CfMA: Center for Multilateral Affairs

CSOs: Civil Society Organizations

ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies

IT: Information Technology

ITU: International Telecommunications Union

MDAs: Ministries, Departments and Agencies

M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation

MP: Member of Parliament

NDP III: Third National Development Plan

NGO: Non-Government Organization

NITA-U: National Information and Technology Authority of Uganda

OTT: Over-The-Top

PWDs: Persons with Disabilities

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

UCC: Uganda Communications Commission

UN: United Nations

WOUGNET: Women of Uganda Network

WRO: Women Rights Online

4IR: Fourth Industrial Revolution

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1. Introduction

This position paper is a result of two important engagements of a multi-stakeholder convenings of the civil society organizations, on how to bridge the gender digital gap in Uganda. Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) and Centre for Multilateral Affairs (CFMA) are currently implementing a project on; **Promoting Smart Policy Options in Closing the Gender Digital Divide in Uganda,** under the auspices of World Web Foundation**.** The project brings together civil society organizations, to collectively chart a common agenda towards closing the gender digital gap in Uganda.

One of the primary goals of this project is to engage and build capacity of policy makers on gender sensitive ICT policy making, implementation, monitoring, evaluation; clearly bringing to light what has worked well and what hasn't as far as policy advocacy is concerned within civil society. It is intended that the project will further identify policy gaps and devise common strategies for engaging with policy makers.

1.1 Background of 1st and 2nd Multi-stakeholder Convenings

The 1st Multi stakeholder workshop of civil society organizations in Uganda was held on 5th August 2020. The meeting was attended by 25 participants. Of these, 64% were female, leaving 36% as male. All participants were from the Civil Society Sector. None of the members registered themselves as belonging to the private sector or government.

The aim was to have a proportion of CSO groups to understand about Women's Rights Online. In particular, the policy advocacy strategies that have worked towards promoting Women's Rights Online and advocacy, and the strategies undertaken so far. Also, the Policy Advocacy gaps that exist and how best CSOs and Policy Makers can work together to promote Women's Rights Online. An oral presentation by the WOUGNET Director, introducing the project and giving the objectives of the workshop; slides presentation with video illustrations on the subject matter by the facilitator; and the round table group discussions by participants (to discuss and generate content around the three main topics that were generated from the objectives of the day) were among the methods used to generate content.

The 2nd Multi stakeholder convening of civil society organizations in Uganda was held on 16th September 2020. Unlike the first convening, the second one was also attended by 22 (Twenty-two) participants, 59% of whom were females and 41% were males. More so, 95.5% of the participants were from the CSO while 4.5% were from Government.

The aim was to identify policy advocacy priorities that can be used by CSOs, identify hindrances faced and identify relevant government ministries and departments that can be engaged by CSOs in closing the gender digital gap in Uganda. The capturing of participants' expectations of the workshop; the TV Program method involved a panel responding to questions asked by the

moderator; the slides presentation on 'Identifying and Developing Policy Advocacy Priorities that the Coalition Can Work On'; and group round table policy discussions (guiding topics to aid the discussion) were among the methods used to generate content from the participants.

1.2. The emerging issues from the 1st and 2nd Multi stakeholder Convenings

The CSOs shared strategic partnerships that had been created for this cause and also mentioned evidence-based research conducted. They also talked about strengthening ways different players are escalating women's rights issues, conducting campaigns on women's rights issues and concerns in different for a and mentioning litigation cases that have occurred in the country. They did agree that skill development and knowledge sharing was being adopted by many within the differing circles in the country and also to increase of feminist principles on the net.

The participants exhaustively discussed Policy Advocacy gaps that exist around Women's Rights Online (WRO). They acknowledged the presence of several laws related to online usage, noting that none specifically addresses WRO; and that there is a negative attitude towards person(s) that take on WRO. Interesting is that they agreed that women themselves criticize fellow women online even more. More so, the participants agreed that there was a huge lack of access to information vital to address WRO. They also added that failure to create and implement good IT policies inhibited access to digital technologies and knowledge. They did express concern over the judiciary's ability to handle cases of person(s) / institutions addressing advocacy gaps surrounding WRO; concluding that there were no well pronounced networking groups amongst the women online because, majorly, political hindrances had scared them off.

During the convenings, the CSOs also discussed and agreed on the avenues on how best CSOs and Policy Makers can work together to promote Women's Rights Online. The several ways fronted included; (1) Building strong partnerships between CSOs in WRO and the government, (2) Encouraging dialogue on WRO between CSO and policy makers, (3) Having more men as allies at the fore front in the whole process, (4) Developing an M&E framework to guide impact and accountability, (5) Strengthening funding initiatives on projects related to WRO, (6) Conducting research and sharing results with relevant stakeholders, (7) Collaborating with Internet Service Providers to track offenders, (8) Documenting cases related to women's online abuse and (9) Putting a Women's Rights Online sustainability plan in place.

Against that background therefore emerging issues from the workshops and the pressing collective needs and aspirations of the CSO, prompted the development of a Civil Society Position Paper that highlights priority areas for redress, to share and engage with policy makers.

2. Terms and definitions

2.1. Digital gender divide

Gender digital divide refers to the gender biases coded into technology products, technology sector and digital skills education.[1] In simple terms, it is the inequalities that exist between men and women, boys and girls in the access, use and affordability of digital technologies and the internet. Globally, some 4.1 billion people (around 53.6%) have access to the internet. Recent data from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) indicates that the global gender gap in internet access has increased to by 55% between 2013 to 2019.[2] Access to digital technologies is significantly skewed in favor of men with men 21% more likely to be online than women.[3] In Uganda, recent research by the Web Foundation shows that the gender digital gap is at 43% with no meaningful connectivity statistics.[4]

Participants of the 1st Multi stakeholder convening unanimously defined gender digital divide as the inequalities that exist between men and women, boys and girls in the access, use and affordability of digital technologies and the internet. The participants postulated that access to digital technologies in Uganda is significantly skewed in favor of men with more likely to be online than women. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to information, cultural perceptions, repressive taxes and ineffective policies and legislations were among other identified obstacles that hinder women from enjoying their digital rights in Uganda.

2.2. Policy advocacy

Policy advocacy is the process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders and ultimately decision makers take ownership of your ideas, evidence and proposals and subsequently act upon them.[5] Policy advocacy seeks to influence the establishment of new policies, improve existing policies and/or challenge policies that impact negatively on particular individuals or groups.

3. Gender digital divide in Uganda

In Uganda, according to a 2015 Uganda Communications Commission survey on Access and Usage of ICTs, only 44% of women owned and could use a phone at any time compared to 62% of the men. Additionally, only 15% of women had used a computer or the internet in the last three months prior to the survey compared to 21% of the men that were interviewed.[6] In other words, despite the increase in access to and use of the internet and ICTs across the board, access and

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[1] UNESCO, EQUALS Skills Coalition (2019). "I'd blush if I could: closing gender divides in digital skills through education" (PDF)

[2] The digital gender gap is growing fast in developing countries https://itu.foleon.com/itu/measuring-digital-development/gender-gap/

[3] World Wide Web Foundation (2020), 'The gender gap in internet access: using a women-centered method' https://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-gender-gap-in-internet-access-using-a-women-centred-method/

[4] World Wide Web Foundation (2020), 'Women's Rights Online: Closing the digital gender gap for a more equal world. Web Foundation'

[5] Defining Policy Advocacy https://advocacyguide.icpolicyadvocacy.org/21-defining-policy-advocacy

[6] UCC (2015), 'Access and Usage of ICT across Uganda https://www.ucc.co.ug/files/downloads/20150130-UCC-access-usage-dissemination'

affordability is still a challenge for large sections of the population especially the poor, rural populations, women, and persons with disabilities. Additionally, only 15% of women had used a computer or the internet in the last three months prior to the survey compared to 21% of the men that were interviewed.[7] Compared to the other cities, Kampala has the largest gender gap in Internet access with only 21% of women reported having used the Internet, versus 61% of men.[8] This is because while internet access has become more affordable, particularly on mobile phones, costs are still expensive for many Ugandans, especially the women who have no significant sources of income.[9]

Members of the CSOs during the Multi stakeholder convenings identified and discussed several enacted laws and policies to promote gender equality in Uganda such as; the Vision 2040, the National Development Plan III, the Equal Opportunities Commission Act (2007) and the National Youth Policy; and members portended that none of them are specific with clear provisions on reducing the gender digital divide. Uganda has also ratified international instruments such as Convention on the Elimination of Domestic Violence against Women (CEDAW), the Maputo Declaration on Gender Mainstreaming (2003), the African Youth Charter (2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals.[10] The participants argued that although, Uganda ratified and domesticated such important international instruments, they have barely remained on paper. In other words, little has been done to implement the tenets of these international instruments regarding bridging the gender digital divide.

3.1.   Impact of the gender digital divide on women's human rights

Participants of the Multi-stakeholders convenings averred that ICTs and human rights are hugely and inextricably intertwined. With the transformative potential of ICTs and big data, the impact on human rights, both positive and negative, has become increasingly apparent. Inequalities in access to and use of the Internet and associated technologies have the potential to undermine the opportunities for realizing human rights and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as ICTs may function as a gateway to the realization of human rights. For example, the Internet enables access to education by allowing online learning resources to be shared. It similarly furthers the right to take part in cultural life and to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its application. Facilitating access to health information and services also positively affects the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Structural and physical limitations of access and use were identified by the participants to interfere with the rights to access to information and freedoms of expression, religion and association, also impacting on the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs. They also infringe upon the

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[7] Ibid

[8] Web Foundation (2016), 'Women's Rights Online Scorecard Uganda'

[9] Freedom House (2018), 'Freedom on the Net/Uganda' at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/uganda

[10] WOUGNET and APC, (2020), 'Bridging the Gender Digital Gap; An Assessment of Women's Rights Online Based on the Principles of the African Declaration of Internet Rights and Freedoms'

rights to work and to an adequate standard of living by limiting access to goods and services, and to employment and business opportunities.

3.2. Legal frameworks on closing the gender digital divide in Uganda
i. International level

Uganda is a signatory to international bodies like the United Nations (UN) which emphasizes that access to the internet is critical to individual and global development — and have codified this into various internet access targets. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) include a target for universal internet access by 2020 and SDG 5 on gender equality specifically advocates for women's empowerment through ICTs.

ii. Regional level

At regional level, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) guarantees comprehensive rights to women. The AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004) calls on AU member states' continual action toward achieving gender equality and reinforcing their commitment to international and regional women's rights instruments. However, many countries across the continent including Uganda are yet to implement its recommendations.

iii. National level

At national level, the current policy environment largely acknowledges the socio-economic and political rights of women. The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995)[11] recognizes through Chapter 4 Article 2 that "All persons are equal before and under the law in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life and in every other respect and shall enjoy equal protection of the law." Further Art 33 of the same Chapter provides for the equality of women. These provisions are further buttressed through the existence of policy frameworks including the National Gender Policy 2007, the National Equal Opportunities Policy 2006

The Uganda Communications Act, 2013 established the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) with a mandate to regulate rates and charges for communications services with the aim of protecting consumers from excessive tariffs and to prevent unfair competitive practices.[12] However, high cost of data and mobile phones, and poor quality of mobile devices persist and are among reasons many women remain offline.

The third National Development Plan (NDP III) identifies the ICT sector as one of the primary growth sectors and recognizes how the opportunities the ICT revolution present can be harnessed through efficient deployment and utilization of digital technologies. However, it is important to

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[11] Constitution of the republic of Uganda, 1995 https://ulii.org/ug/legislation/consolidated-act/0
[12] UCC Act, 2013 https://www.ucc.co.ug/files/downloads/UCC%20Act%202013.pdf

note that such national development strategies do not specifically highlight the gender digital divide as a hindering factor that should be addressed with urgency.

Section 4 of the National ICT Policy of Uganda highlights the need for universal access, mainstreaming women, ICT promotion and awareness among cross-cutting issues. In addition, it highlights the role of government in ensuring equitable and affordable access to telecommunication services for all the citizens of Uganda through an enabled and competitive private sector.[13] Government needs to do more to ensure that ICT products and services offered by the private sector are affordable and of good quality. This can be ensured through progressive ICT laws that put into consideration the realities of women in the ICT sector.

Uganda's National Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Strategy lists among critical enablers; ensuring that all Ugandans can participate fully in the 4IR by establishing cost effective and fast interaction between the digital and physical world, and an education ecosystem that provides all Ugandans with the skills needed to create and participate in economic opportunities in the 4IR.[14]

So, while the government recognizes ICT as an enabling tool for the inclusive and sustainable development of the country, and acknowledges the existence of a gender digital gap, the policies in place for women empowerment are not comprehensive enough to address emerging trends and issues in the digital era. There is need to review existing legal frameworks to ensure they are aligned with the latest technological trends and issues. In collaboration with civil society and the private sector, the government needs to conduct evidence-based research to find out why women are less likely than men to access, use and afford digital technologies. Such gender disaggregated data can then be a guideline for the government in formulating national policies focused on closing the gender digital gap.

4. Policy Advocacy Strategies that Have Worked for Promoting Women's' Rights Online
A number of advocacy strategies were mentioned by the participants in one of the multi-stakeholder meetings as having been adopted by different players with the aim of promoting Women's Rights Online (WRO). Those mentioned included;

1. **Strategic partnerships:** the participants said that several partnerships had been formed between individuals and institutions with the common interest of addressing concerns of WRO. An example given was the meeting of the day. Such meetings lead to both formal and informal relationships. They bring together persons with a common agenda.
2. **Building on evidence-based research:** the participants noted that several institutions today make decisions based on sound research and not opinion. What is even more emphatic is that during selection of the respondents, more efforts are made to include the

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[13] The national ICT Policy of Uganda https://ict.go.ug/2018/11/23/national-ict-policy/
[14] Executive Summary – Uganda's National 4IR Strategy https://ict.go.ug/2020/10/26/executive-summary-ugandas-national-4ir-strategy/

more vulnerable persons like women and PWDs. Research data is made more public these days.

3. **Escalating women's rights in different fora:** the discussion was that women's rights online were not a global issue; with the example of the international forum of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) which is a unique process that involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. Participants agreed that his kind of platform ought to discuss highly the WRO. The conversation of women's rights is not about online presence only but offline too.

4. **Strategic Litigation**: mentioned was the case of Woman MP Rwabongo Sylvia vs Brian Isiko. In her petition, the legislator alleged that Isiko (a student of YMCA) had repeatedly sent her lustful love messages between late 2017 and June 2018, which had disturbed her peace of mind, however, the Buganda Road Court had dismissed the case[15]. She, including many others opted to pursue a legal case citing being a victim of violence against women online, as part of a strategy to promote WRO.

5. **Online campaign on women's rights issues**: Also mentioned were individuals involved in bringing about broader social change; like the case of Stella Nyanzi a frontline defender for human rights. It was also agreed that, especially with growing adoption of citizen journalism, the number of women media journalists is increasing.

6. **Women's match rights act:** cited was the women's match in Kampala that took place in 2018. It was to bring attention to the security officials and other leaders on the need to stop the femicides in Entebbe. It was successful!

7. **Skills development and knowledge sharing:** Also, mentioned were the several digital literacy trainings for women organized by government and civil society. This they said equips the women with skills to take advantage of the internet in varying ways.

8. **Feminist principles on the net:** There are laws in existence, like The Computer Misuse and Data Protection Acts. It was agreed that women can use these laws to further advance the advocacy for WRO. As one of the main features of the Council, the UPR is designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed. The ultimate aim of this mechanism is to improve the human rights situation in all countries and address human rights violations wherever they occur. Currently, no other universal mechanism of this kind exists.

9. **Creating positions for women e.g. Gender and Disability:** Having a specific desk that deals with women's and PWDs issues is key. For instance, The Internet Chapter has such a desk, and this should be emulated for all government ministries, departments and agencies.

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[15] Daily Monitor, (2020), 'Court sets free Kabarole Woman MP's stalker Isiko'
www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/court-sets-free-kabarole-woman-mp-s-stalker-isiko-1873098

5. Key barriers in closing the gender digital divide

In accordance with the web foundation's latest report, although the internet, has great potential for economic opportunity and social empowerment, digital inequalities exhibit both consequences and causes, of broader inequalities. The discussions transcending from the multi-stakeholders' meetings were in agreement with these thoughts as all stakeholders agreed that the digital gender gap is more than basic internet access. And involves more of 'Meaningful Connectivity' which faces four major hindrances including; lack of time for internet usage, income inequalities, a lack of digital skills and service quality and availability, leading to the rural-urban divide. The meetings highlighted that women are affected mostly as they are usually short of time to use the internet due to other 'gender specific roles' as society and patriarchal systems connote; also, around the world, women still earn less than men; although service quality and availability is still low in rural and rural-urban societies for both women and men, the level of knowledge and skills in device usage is still very low among women.[16]

Among issues cited from the web foundation recent report, below are barriers which were identified by the civil society organization (CSOs) representatives that attended the two CSOs multi-stakeholders convening;

I.   **Legislations**; there was a general acknowledgment of existing laws related to online usage, however none specifically addresses Women's rights online. Even so, a fragment of the public knows about the existence of these laws and worse still, few know how to translate them and/or are aware of what to do in case of an event/crisis. This problem is attributed to inadequate consultation methods used in law and policy enactment. This can be associated with lack of political will and unprecedented bureaucracies which limit collaboration between the public and private sectors.

II. **Ineffective female representation at the decision-making level in the government;** what is explicitly relevant in the highly digitalized economic growth is the involvement of women who make up more than half of the population of this world in high decision-making roles. However, the ineffective female representation is alarming and either attributed to intimidation by male counterparts or undermining contributions of female leaders. Women's talent, human capital and productivity should be recognized.

III. **OTT and stamp duty are high hence affecting the marginalized groups;** during the discussions, it emerged that the right to online freedom roots for privileged citizens. This was based on the general analysis of events overtaken by ambiguous policies and laws imposed on the citizens of Uganda without any consultative processes undertaken. In this instance, the participants measured the realities of class and privilege as being repressive, making survival less empowering for just anyone to access the internet. Some of the issues mentioned under this included the Over-The-Top (OTT) services effected on 1st July 2018,

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[16] World Wide Web Foundation (2020), 'Women's Rights Online: Closing the digital gender gap for a more equal world. Web Foundation'

involving the payment of a 200 shillings tax per day to affect the use of all internet applications that offer voice and messaging services including, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Snap-Chat, Instagram and Skype. Meanwhile the Stamp duty which is payable to the Uganda Revenue Authority on every document that confers any right or liability upon being created, transferred, limited, extended, extinguished or recorded has affected the price of goods and services in telecommunication services. Still, participants made claims that the expensive facet of internet usage has driven away many people mostly women due to affordability and failure to sustain this kind of lifestyle.

IV. **Inadequate infrastructural development to support the use of digital technologies;** the inadequacy in ICT tools and infrastructure has frustrated access and usage of the internet at the national level. To top this up, there is limited internet coverage and accessibility, high costs of ICT tools and devices and limited access to information. The local community is hit drastically because of weak network connectivity, lack of electricity, and where there is solar it is not sustainable, absence of hi-tech consultants and technicians to help in phone repairs among others.

V. **Lack of digital skills;** at an international level, grassroot communities and rural women in developing states benefit least from ICT revolutions and this is attributed to a general exclusion in the digital economy.

VI. **Lack of access to gender disaggregated information**; it should be noted that access to information is dire in validating and effecting citizen's voices as well to monitor and hold the government to account. There are barriers hindering the capacity and incentives of governments to produce information, the ability of citizens to claim their right to information and to use it to demand better governance and public services. Equally, the general lack of information online delays the eminence of addressing Women's rights online which is attributed to failure in creating and implementing the policies that inhibit access to digital technologies and knowledge.

VII. **Online safety and security;** whereas there are legal frameworks that help to deal with cybercrime, the redundancy in developing comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks that guarantee women's rights online is worrying. Rather, the government has resorted to delegating its mandates associated with online security to private companies (most of which have no physical presence in Uganda), regenerating common mistakes which lead to gender digital divides. It was also noted that attention towards cyber harassment that most women face online is very low. For instance, crimes in this circle are treated as minor by institutions like the Police yet they have a very high emotional, mental and physical effect on the victims.

VIII. **Government priorities,** the participants expressed concern over the government's ability and interest in addressing policy gaps surrounding WRO. The participants highlighted that the police whose role is to enforce law and order, including protecting people and their property seems to be detached from people's online safety. They noted that to put laws in place was one thing and to enforce them was another. Therefore, the Police's lack of
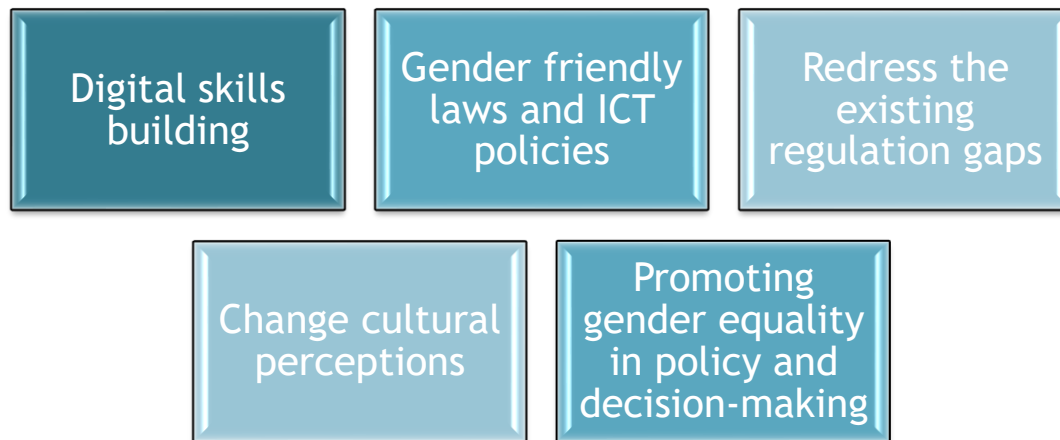
knowledge of the issues that women face online reflects a gap which continues to affect women's online presence. Thus, more needs to be done in educating the enforcers if they are to do their job well in addressing cases that victims of cyber harassment report.

IX. **Attitudes/mindset**; there is a generalized negative perception on women's rights online and advocates for Women's Rights Online. It is interesting that women themselves criticize fellow women online even more. This negative attitude towards the victim(s) and the experiences they go through further discourages those that are abused to speak up.

X. **Network building and sustainability;** at both local and national level, Uganda's network building capacities are still low and are oftentimes politicized and criminalized. At the time of these multi-stakeholder meetings, the country was warming up for the political parties' primaries' and any convening or online advocacy was or is still looked at as a political threat. What does this mean? Most times, the government is allegedly believed to cause abrupt internet throttling to stop online convenings and sharing of information highly discouraging citizens or internet users from engaging fully and freely with others. Yet, most people are looking at the internet as a growing space and as a way of making a difference, trying out new ideas, finding solutions to challenges, and sharing their experiences. one of the participants added that; "networking is seen as a safe space that can help women achieve their highest potential". Adding that, "female networking groups help women remove their masks as these are safe spaces which source courage to embrace the risks and opportunities they have been avoiding". However, it is disturbing to face the realities where the "safe spaces" are fully controlled and have created fear instead of freedom.

XI. **Monitoring and Evaluation;** follow ups are lacking on the progress of the implemented projects and their impacts on the people. There is need to strengthen M&E measures as well as building the capacity of human resources engaged in this activity in order to identify policy gaps.

6. Policy recommendations for closing the gender digital divide in Uganda

The participants discussed the policy advocacy priorities that they felt could be used to close the gender digital gap in Uganda. below is a summary;

Summary of recommendations

Digital skills building	Gender friendly laws and ICT policies	Redress the existing regulation gaps

Change cultural perceptions	Promoting gender equality in policy and decision-making

The gender digital divide can be viewed beyond access and classified into various ways that women are excepted from accessing and using ICTs. These are political, economic, social and cultural in nature and to mitigate this problem, the coalition of CSOs can play an active role through policy advocacy by leveraging and bridging the gaps for sustainable crossovers as far as policy implementation and awareness are concerned. Below are some of the key smart policy options the coalition identified that the government should use in closing the gender digital divide in Uganda;

1. Gender friendly laws and ICT policies

I. Continuous multi-stakeholder consultations to pen down thoughts and efforts on digital concerns and opportunities for resolution. Communities (even those at grass-root level) should be able to make direct input into bills and laws.

II. Increase awareness of existing laws, while enhancing and modifying them to suit current issues for example, introduce protection laws on exploitation and exposure.

III. There is need for a gender responsive ICT policy curriculum to adequate female representation in policy formulation regarding ICTs.

IV. Engage the private sector to consider gender mainstreaming in their innovations and inventions and increase funding to gender digital causes.

V. Implement national broadband policies with specific actions designed to target systematically excluded populations.

2. Digital skills building

I. Drawing practical approaches to digital skills development to address digital illiteracy.

II. Encourage CSOs and government to increase sensitization and training with the aim of empowering women on digital skills and tools and about online safety and security. This should start at a young age and must include Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). This should take both an informal and formal approach.

III. In addition, access to technology skills should be free for low-income earners, especially women by revamping ICT centers. Equally, platforms for less privileged citizens to access ICT services and accessibility should be free and availed.

IV. More infrastructure and funding are needed to support existing services which should be as well extended into remote and rural areas.

3. Address the existing regulation gaps

I. There is need for increased accessibility and usage of ICT tools and services. Therefore, this calls for a redress in the existing social media taxes (Stamp Duty and OTT).

II. Reduce the cost of ICT tools through strategic partnerships between government and private sectors. The call for a reduction of taxes on ICT tools is to root for affordability for all citizens including women and girls.

4. Promoting gender equality in policy and decision-making spaces at all levels

I. Governments must put comprehensive strategies in place as well as exercise policy reforms and commitments now to ensure that the fast-rising tide of technology and its use does not leave women behind by denying them the right to participate fully and freely.

5. Cultural perceptions

I. Uganda being a patriarchal society, it is a common perception that technology is not for women. There is need to increase awareness to eradicate the cultural perceptions and gender stereotypes that hinder both women and girls from utilizing digital technologies. Other than enabling rural access, the women and girls at the grassroot communities should not be denied a chance to embrace and participate in the digital economy that has been made possible by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Identified government and CSO in closing the gender digital divide

The participants were also tasked to identify relevant government MDAs that can be engaged by the coalition of CSOs in closing the gender digital gap. See responses below.

eneble gender friendly laws	redress the existing regulation gaps	Skill building	gender equality in policy and decision making	Cultural perceptions
• Ministry of ICT an National Guidance • NITA-U	• Ministry of ICT and National Guidance • NITA-U • UCC	• UCC • Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation • Ministry of ICT and National Guidance • Ministry of Gender, labour and Social Development • Ministry of Education and Sports • NITA-U • Private Sector Foundation Uganda	• Ministry of ICT and National Guidance • All CSO's • Local government	• NITA-U • Government Citizens interaction Center • Ministry of ICT and National Guidance

7. Conclusion

The digital transformation provides new opportunities for the economic empowerment of women and girls and can contribute to greater gender equality in Uganda. However, if left unchallenged, the gender digital gap threatens to exacerbate the gender gap and hinder inclusive and sustainable development. This position paper, therefore, aims to strengthen the CSOs voice in closing the digital gap and improving policies to ensure gender disaggregated digital policies are implemented that ensure equitable participation of women and girls in the digital economy in Uganda. The coalition of CSOs calls for stronger cooperation across stakeholders to remove barriers to girls and women's full participation in the digital economy by addressing the underlying structural problems such as gender stereotypes, poor infrastructure/lack of access and lack of digital skills which affect majorly women.

Looking ahead, CSOs (international and local) and with the government are highly encouraged to strengthen sustainable partnerships aimed at closing the gender digital divide. Equally, these are encouraged to develop an M&E framework that guides and monitors the impact of the policies formulated while keeping track of the gender digital gap. In addition, funding initiatives on projects related to narrowing the gender digital gap in Uganda should be strengthened in order to achieve high quality research/data on issues that are keeping women and girls offline. Such

evidence-based data will be very pertinent in identifying existing gaps in policies. Lastly, there is need to collaborate with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the law enforcers to track online offenders so as to document cases related to women's online abuse such the internet becomes a safe space for all.