

## **W4GF Statement for Youth International Day 2024: “From Clicks to Progress: Youth Digital Pathways for Sustainable Development”**

On Youth International Day 2024, under the theme "[From Clicks to Progress: Youth Digital Pathways for Sustainable Development](#)," W4GF, a global movement network of 327 advocates from 75 countries, dedicated to promoting gender equality within the Global Fund programs, emphasises the important role of youth leadership in advancing gender equity in digital health.

As we navigate the digital transformation of health policies, especially in the context of HIV, TB, and Malaria, it is crucial to recognise and harness the potential of youth to drive innovation and equity. Women in their diversity<sup>1</sup> and youth leadership is vital in shaping the future of digital health as young people bring fresh perspectives, technological fluency, and a deep understanding of the challenges faced by their peers. Engaging youth in digital health initiatives ensures that solutions are relevant, inclusive, and tailored to the needs of diverse communities. Youth women leaders can advocate for more equitable policies, challenge existing disparities, and contribute to the design of digital tools that better address gender-specific health needs.

However, [The 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW67\)](#) underscored the slow progress toward gender equality in technology and innovation. As of 2022, global internet usage shows a significant gender gap: 63% of women compared to 69% of men. In low-income countries, only 20% of women are connected. Beyond connectivity, gender inequality in technology manifests in various forms. For instance, between 16% and 58% of women globally have faced online or tech-facilitated gender-based violence, and about 85% have witnessed such harassment against other women<sup>2</sup>.

Women and girls highlighted that digitalization can amplify existing social, cultural, and economic inequalities, particularly when technology fails to address gender-specific needs and issues. CSW67 has illuminated these challenges and emphasized the need for inclusive digital governance and equitable access to ensure that technology serves all genders effectively.

***Thus, do countries' digital health strategies/policies take into account the principles of equity from a gendered lens while developing or implementing such strategies? How do current digital health strategies and policies consider equity from a gender perspective?***

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<sup>1</sup> This includes women living HIV or affected by TB and malaria; women who identify as heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or non-binary; women who use drugs; sex workers over 18-years old; adolescent girls and young women; Indigenous women; women who are sometimes displaced internally; migrants and refugees; women and girls who are or have been incarcerated; and women with visible and invisible disabilities.

<sup>2</sup>Why gender equality is important than ever?<https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/why-gender-equality-in-technology-is-more-urgent-than-ever-107191>

Countries with robust national digital health strategies, such as India, Kenya, and Rwanda, demonstrate the potential of integrating gender equity into digital health policies. [India's National Digital Health Blueprint and Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission](#), [Kenya's National eHealth Policy 2016-2030](#), and [Rwanda's Digital Health Strategic Plan](#) include gender equity considerations to ensure women benefit equally from digital health innovations. These strategies typically focus on key areas such as:

1. Ensuring women have equal access to digital health tools and services.
2. Providing targeted education and training to help women effectively use digital health technologies.
3. Collecting sex-disaggregated data to address gender disparities in health outcomes.
4. Designing digital health interventions that meet the specific needs of women, including maternal and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.

Additionally, youth-led initiatives are vital in this context as they often bring innovative solutions and fresh perspectives to digital health challenges. Engaging and involving youth in digital health, especially concerning HIV, TB, and malaria, is crucial for developing more inclusive and effective interventions. To support this, W4GF recommends that the Global Fund and other donors:

- Ensure women and youth are involved in creating digital health policies and strategies.
- Invest in infrastructure and education to provide equitable access to digital health tools for all genders.
- Implement robust data privacy measures that address the specific needs of women and marginalized communities.
- Allocate funds specifically for initiatives addressing gender disparities in digital health

### ***Current Status and Challenges***

Countries are increasingly recognizing the importance of integrating gender equity into digital health strategies. However, the extent of this integration varies. High-income countries (HICs) often have more advanced strategies compared to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where more work is needed. Global frameworks, such as the [WHO Global Strategy on Digital Health \(2020-2025\)](#) and the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), underscore the need to address gender disparities and promote equity.

Despite these frameworks, socio-cultural barriers persist. In many LMICs, gender norms and cultural practices limit women's access to digital services. Men often control mobile phones, and women may face restrictions on using digital tools<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://equityhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1475-9276-12-85>

Today, three billion people remain unconnected to the Internet, the majority of whom are women and girls<sup>4</sup>. Women also lag behind men in the effective use of technology, as that capability interacts with other dimensions of discrimination, such as education and skills gaps<sup>5</sup>.

## Recommendations

To effectively engage women and youth and promote gender equity in digital health, W4GF recommends the following actions for the Global Fund, the partnership and other international organisations:

1. Fund and support projects led by youth that focus on digital health innovations, in addressing HIV, TB, and Malaria. Youth-led initiatives often bring new insights and effective solutions to the forefront. For instance, youth-driven social media campaigns can raise awareness and counter stigma around HIV, TB, and malaria, while mobile health apps designed by young developers offer accessible tools for managing health. Peer-led workshops and virtual support groups provide relatable education and emotional support, and digital storytelling projects humanise health issues by sharing personal experiences. Additionally, youth-led research and data collection ensure that health solutions are evidence-based.
2. Ensure that young people are included in the development of digital health policies and strategies in the grant implementation phase. Their perspectives can help shape more inclusive and effective policies.
3. Allocate resources to digital literacy and training programs specifically for young women.
4. Support the creation of digital health tools and policies that are designed with a gender-transformative approach, taking into account the specific needs and challenges faced by young women and girls.
5. Promote the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data to better understand and address gender disparities in health outcomes.

***Youth leadership is crucial for advancing digital health and addressing global health challenges such as HIV, TB, and Malaria. Engaging young people in the development and implementation of digital health strategies, can create more equitable and effective health solutions. W4GF calls on the Global Fund and donors to support youth-led initiatives, invest in digital literacy, and promote gender-transformative approaches to ensure that digital health pathways contribute to sustainable development and health equity for all.***

## Signatories

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/technology-and-gender-equality%E2%80%9494bringing-women-and-girls-centre-innovation>

<sup>5</sup> The digital gender gap in healthcare : <https://hash.theacademy.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-Digital-Gender-Gap-in-HealthCare.pdf>

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