Advancing Gender Equality in the Science, Technology and Innovation in Mauritius

Introduction

To commemorate International Women's Day 2025, under the global theme ***"For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment,"*** the UN Country Team in Mauritius partnered with the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, and the University of Mauritius to co-host a Round Table on ***"The Future of Gender Equality for Women in the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Sector in Mauritius."***

This Policy Brief emerges from the Round Table, outlining key challenges, opportunities, and actionable recommendations to advance women's rights and participation in the digital and ICT sectors, including STEM fields. It emphasizes the urgency of promoting inclusive participation, addressing structural barriers, and ensuring equal opportunities for all women and girls in a digital age.

These discussions take place against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving global digital economy, a transformative force now contributing over 15.5% of global GDP and projected to generate 70% of new economic value over the next decade through digitally enabled platforms business models.[1] Digital technologies have already expanded access to education, information, and economic mobility. Yet, gender gaps persist: women make up only 29.2% of the STEM workforce across 146 countries, compared to nearly 50% in non-STEM roles (Global Gender Gap Report, 2023).[2]

In this context, as Mauritius intensifies its digital transformation agenda through its 2025–2029 Government Programme, addressing the gender digital divide is not just a matter of equity - it is an economic necessity. Enabling women's full participation in this high-growth sector is critical for ensuring a resilient, innovative, and inclusive digital future.

1.Yahya, D.A. (2023). Why tech diplomacy is key to embracing the digital economy. [online] World Economic Forum. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/12/tech-diplomacy-harness-digital-economy/.
2. World Economic Forum (2023). *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*. [online] World Economic Forum. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/digest/.

1. Key Challenges Identified

UNITED NATIONS MAURITIUS AND SEYCHELLES

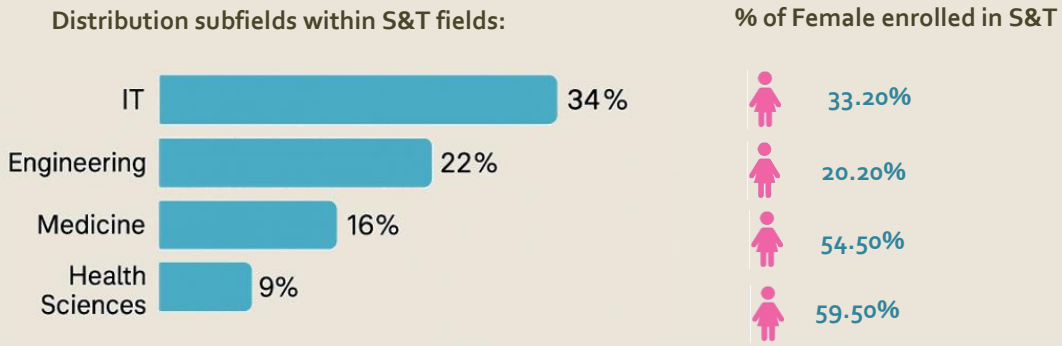
A. Gender Disparities In Science, Technology and Innovation Education & Skills Development

- **Outdated education system:** The current educational curricula are not adequately aligned with the evolving demands of the digital economy. This gap is particularly pronounced for female students who are not adequately prepared for digital careers. Additionally, limited exposure to STI subjects hinders students from acquiring foundational knowledge and practical skills necessary for contributing to innovation-led industries and economies. There is also lack of dedicated scholarships and incentives to encourage women in ICT education.

- **STEM enrollment is increasing but needs earlier exposure:**

  - **Secondary Education (A-levels):** STEM enrollment at A-levels is increasing but needs earlier exposure. Only **28-30%** of students take STEM subjects, with **18%** being **male** and **12% female.** ***(MES & Statistics Mauritius)***

  - **Tertiary Education:** Science & Technology (S&T) enrollment accounts for **26%** of total university enrollment ***(HEC, 2023)***. Only 1,500 ICT graduates are produced annually, yet industry demand exceeds supply.***(Statistics Mauritius)***



Women lag behind in the Engineering and IT fields.

- **Limited practical knowledge:** Girls are often not taught basic technical skills (e.g., how to change a bulb and cables), which could spark interest in ICT fields.

- **Digital exclusion & safety concerns:** The education system lacks disability-inclusive ICT learning and staff training. Even government websites are not fully accessible. Online safety shows that girls and women are more vulnerable to cyber threats, requiring better education on AI, cybersecurity, and digital safety.

B. Workplace Bias & Structural Barriers

- **Gender stereotypes:** The underrepresentation of women in leadership and technical roles within the STI sector is a pressing challenge. Entrenched gender stereotypes, systemic barriers and societal expectations dissuade girls and young women from pursuing education and careers in STEM fields

- **Low female participation:** Female representation in ICT and engineering remains low, with only 8,035 women employed. Women make up just 4.4% of the ICT workforce. ***(Mauritius Research & Innovation Council, 2019)***.
- **Workplace culture:** Limited mentorship and professional development opportunities for women in technology.
- **Pay gap & career advancement issues:** Gender pay disparities and limited career progression for women in the private ICT sector.
- **Barriers in accessing funds:** Women struggle to secure financing from banks for tech startups due to bias in financial institutions.

2. Key Opportunities For Gender Equality In Digital Sector

A. Government Commitment To Digital Growth

- Mauritius ranks **1st in Africa in the UN E-Government Development Index 2024.**
- **Government Programme (2025-2029)** prioritizes digitalization, AI, cybersecurity, and e-governance.
- The **ICT Blueprint and Digital Mauritius 2030 Strategy** provide a framework for expanding gender-inclusive ICT policies.

B. Rising Demand for Digital Skills & Talent

- ICT contributed **5.7%** to **GDP** in 2023 and is a key driver of economic transformation. ***(Economic Development Board Mauritius)***
- The country is positioning itself as a **regional digital hub** for Africa, Asia, and Europe.
- With emerging technologies, there is an increasing demand for diverse perspectives and talents.

C. Supportive International Frameworks

- **Beijing+30 Declaration** and **Global Digital Compact** advocate for women's inclusion in digital economies.
- The Mauritius **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2024-2028** prioritizes STI as a driver for gender equity.

3. Actionable Policy recommendations

A. Strengthening STEM Education, Digital Skills Development & Early Exposure

- **Introduce digital literacy & coding at primary school level with more dedicated hours** to promote early engagement, foundational skills, and prepare students for the demands of the digital economy.

- **Organize school visits to cybercity & tech hubs** to expose students, especially girls to the tech industry. By interacting with professionals, observing cutting-edge technologies, and exploring the dynamic nature of the digital economy, students particularly young girls can gain a deeper understanding of potential career paths in the tech industry. Such experiences help break down stereotypes, build confidence, and inspire the next generation of innovators and leaders.

- **Revise the national education curriculum** to incorporate more practical ICT hours and hands-on technical training, such as troubleshooting basic technology issues, to better equip students with essential digital skills.

- **Holistic education initiatives at Polytechnics and vocational training institutions:** Expanding women's enrollment in digital-related courses by providing targeted support, mentorship and accessible pathways. These initiatives will empower women with the skills needed to excel in the digital economy and contribute to a more inclusive tech workforce.

- **Introduce hands-on training for girls in basic technology skills** to enhance their confidence and foster greater engagement in STEM fields. Practical experience empowers them to navigate digital challenges effectively and encourages interest in technology careers.

- Implementing **disability-inclusive ICT education** is crucial to ensuring equal opportunities for all learners. Training educators to create accessible, inclusive learning environments and support students with disabilities. This approach fosters digital literacy for all students, empowering them to thrive in technology-driven fields and participate actively in the digital economy.

- **Community training programmes for young girls** should pivot from traditional courses like sewing and cooking to include basic technical training in areas such as electrical work and coding. This shift will empower young girls with practical skills relevant to the modern workforce, encouraging their participation in STEM fields and breaking gender stereotypes.

- **Educate boys on gender equality & respect**: Gender equality education should actively involve boys to reshape societal norms Teaching them about respect, equality, and challenging stereotypes fosters inclusivity, breaks traditional gender roles, and promotes mutual respect across all genders.

- **Enhance AI and cybersecurity education** in schools to empower girls to navigate digital spaces safely to avoid digital victimization. Early exposure to AI and cybersecurity equips them with skills for safe digital navigation, encourages participation in high-demand tech roles, and helps bridge the gender gap in STEM while fostering secure digital engagement.

B. Workplace & Leadership Policies

- **Adopting gender-equal hiring and promotion policies in** ICT companies is essential for fostering workplace diversity and inclusivity. Such policies ensure fair opportunities for women in leadership as well as technical roles, helping to bridge the gender gap and create a more balanced representation. This approach also drives innovation by incorporating diverse perspectives into decision-making and problem-solving processes at workplaces.

- **Mandate equal pay** in ICT roles through policy reforms.

- **Establish mentorship and leadership programmes** for women in the tech industry.

- **Strengthen leadership programmes** to support women in ICT management and executive roles.

- **Scale up the practical national toolkit** developed by Business Mauritius, in partnership with UNFPA, **to prevent gender-based violence in the workplace**. The initiative addresses findings that 60% of employees believe such incidents are underreported, with 42% of women experiencing sexist behavior, compared to 31% of men. The toolkit offers policies, reporting mechanisms, and training to foster respectful workplaces, promote male allyship, and align with ILO Convention 190.

C. Enhancing Gender-Responsive ICT Policies

- **Establish a national gender monitoring mechanism** on gender equality initiatives to track progress, identify gaps, and ensure accountability.

- **Strengthen the integration of gender considerations** into the National AI Strategy, Cybersecurity Strategy, and ICT Blueprint.

- **Reinforce the gender cell** within the Ministry of ICT to oversee implementation.

- **Legislation** to act as guardrails to specifically **address and prosecute gender-based online harassment**. Strengthening legal frameworks will provide digital safety, particularly for women and girls and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions in online spaces.

D. Financial & Entrepreneurial Support

- Establish **government-backed funding programmes** that provide financial assistance, resources, and mentorship for women-led ICT businesses. These programmes will empower women entrepreneurs, promote innovation and help bridge the gender gap in the tech industry.
- **Provide tax incentives for companies** that demonstrate and maintain gender-inclusive hiring practices, to promote diversity in the tech industry.
- **Provide targeted scholarships and training programmes** for women in AI, cybersecurity, FinTech, and IoT.

E. Digital Inclusion & Infrastructure

- **Establish dedicated ICT training centers** with a focus on women's empowerment.

F. Foster Public-Private Partnerships

- **Strengthen collaboration between government, academia, and the private sector** to drive gender equality in ICT. This partnership can develop policies, programmes, and initiatives that support women's participation, growth, and leadership in the technology sector.

G. Mentorship Pathways for Girls in Technology

- **Launch mentorship programmes** connecting young girls with successful women in tech to inspire, guide, and encourage them to pursue careers in technology while fostering confidence and ambition.

Conclusion & Call of Action

This roundtable discussion has highlighted critical steps to ensure equal participation of women in the digital economy. Mauritius must **update its education system, promote gender-inclusive workplace policies, launch mentorship programmes, enhance gender-sensitive cybercrime legislation and strengthen digital safety and access** to create a more equitable future for women in ICT. To translate these discussions into action, stakeholders, including the government, private sector, and civil society, must work together to implement these recommendations. A comprehensive policy framework promoting gender equality in ICT will empower more women to become leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs in the digital world.