

# WEEKLY

## DISPATCH

Issue 6

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Inspiring Innovation and Leadership

KARATINA UNIVERSITY

### #IWD2023 PROFFERS CHANCE TO ENHANCE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT



Photo: Courtesy

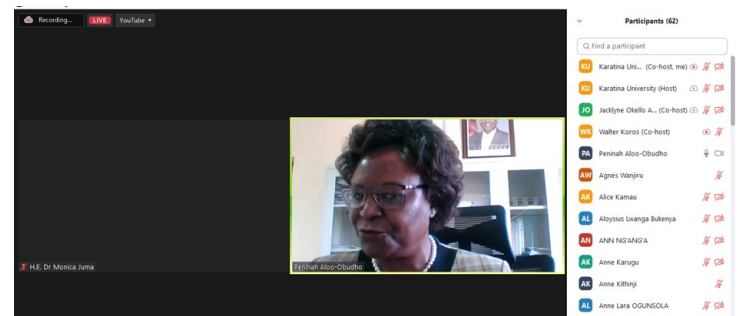
Karatina University concluded the annual globally-celebrated International Women's Day with a clarion call to bridge gender gaps in all spheres of life. Guided by the Theme '*DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality*', the internationally-attended virtual celebrations organized by the University's International Women's Day Committee chaired by Prof. Juliet Macharia was held on Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

#### *Make Digital Space Inclusive and Equitable*

In his welcoming remarks, the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mucai Muchiri, who was represented by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic, Research and Students Affairs), Prof. Peninah Aloo-Obudho, stated that empowering women with digital technology skills will give them equal opportunities to pursue and thrive in STEM careers hence narrowing the gender gap. This would also enhance their economic security, ensure a diverse and talented STEM workforce and prevent biases in these fields. This assertion comes at the backdrop of a UN Women Report that stated that persistent gender gap in digital access has kept women from

unlocking technology's full potential. Their underrepresentation in STEM education and careers remain a major barrier to their participation in technology design and governance.

The Vice Chancellor applauded the Government of Kenya's initiative to develop the National Digital Master Plan which is intended to guide the country's quest to become a digital economy. In this Plan, the Government envisages to train over one million people on digital technology. He called upon the participants present to encourage women and girls within their circles to take advantage of these Government initiatives.



*Prof. Peninah Aloo-Obudho the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic, Research and Students Affairs) representing the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mucai Muchiri*

The Vice Chancellor also challenged universities in Africa to play their rightful role in training women on digital technology so as to create a critical mass of skilled labour to support the digital economy. This would, he said, make the digital space more inclusive and equitable, significantly narrow the gender gap and create a better future not only for women and girls but for all humanity.

## Innovation and Technology for the Protection and Empowerment of Women



*Ambassador (Dr.) Monica Juma*

The Chief Guest, Amb. (Dr) Monicah Juma, the National Security Advisor to the President of the Republic of Kenya spoke on *'Leveraging Innovation and Technology for the Protection and Empowerment of Women.'* She echoed that the Day proffers strategies on how to enhance gender equality in general and women empowerment in particular.

*"It is a day when all humanity under the aegis of the United Nations celebrate and re-affirm their stand on social justice and equality for a better society."*

Amb. Monica Juma stated that, across the world, there are still injustices and inequalities but that it was more pronounced in Africa. Situations of scarcity, stress and underdevelopment characterized by limited resources and lack of empowerment have led to the inability to access and enjoy full rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic, whose effects were largely experienced by women and girls as majority caregivers, providers and frontline workers, played a role in increasing the gender gap as the country witnessed an increase in early pregnancies during and after the pandemic period. The effect of economic slowdown and shut down also made many women, especially in the informal sector, to lose their small businesses and survival mechanics. The raging war in Europe has triggered logistics and supply chain crisis, thus, triggering an increase in inflation that has hit the whole world but largely the marginalized people. Climate crisis has put the society in dire straits but more specifically on women because they bear the brunt for this burden. In Africa, there is continued diminishing food security and survival of livelihoods of women. Such effects, she alluded, would have a definite impact to the future.

### *What is needed?*

Amb. Juma stated that as a result of all these challenges, gender discussions must focus on equality, productivity, security and destiny issues. All humanity is born equal and the Constitution of Kenya provides for the full realization of each person's potential. On productivity, evidence across board shows that any sector, company or enterprise that employs and deploys women performs better. It is also a security issue because security forces develop better mission readiness and execution, have better sensibility and secure societies better when women are involved. Finally, it is a destiny issue because a society that has put women in their rightful positions have better societies and quality of life.

She articulated that innovation and technology are levers that can be used to safeguard gains made in order to accelerate gender empowerment.

*"Technology is a decisive factor in the systematic competition between democracies and non-democracies, between human success and failure. In the uptake of technology, it is critical to check on how*

women can access the digital world. The services should be made easy to access and also campaign for an enabling framework and policies.'

There are a number of normative frameworks put in place to affirm gender equality and empowerment. In Africa, there is the Maputo Protocol, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the East African Community Treaty which enhances the role of women. At the national level, there is the Constitution 2010 which creates a platform for gender equality and non-discrimination and Vision 2030 which emphasizes the need for women economic empowerment among others.

*'Despite all these elaborate normative frameworks, we are still hindered by history, patriarchy, cultural beliefs and material circumstance of poverty. Therefore, fighting for women's rights becomes a global endeavor.'*

Empowering women ensures they are not easily bullied. This can be in terms of availing education to them where there is exposure to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields and an opportunity to participate in innovation. Bridging the financial inclusion gap also empowers women economically which, in effect, enables them to provide balanced diet to

their families and education for their children.

'Women should also be provided with data for planning at institutions and government level. This allows them to have right targeting, correct planning, right questioning when making policy decisions and monitor the impact of the services at the individual and national level.'

Amb. Juma emphatically noted that young youth and women need to be mentored and encouraged across sectors. This can be realized by educating women innovators and programmers on matters patenting and intellectual protection rights so that their ideas are not stolen or reproduced. There should also be zero tolerance on women harassment and abuse.

*"The digital environment provides women space to be educated, mentored and empowered but it should not be viewed as a women versus men competition. Innovation and technology need to be driven with the aim of achieving diversity. This will help in ensuring that no one is left behind and lead to poverty reduction, thus, achieving a fruitful society," she concluded.*

## WHAT THEY SAID.....

**Topic: DigitALL or 'dig it all'. Is Technology Shrinking to Widen the Gender Gap?**

**M**edia has been big on gendering but with the coming of digital technology, it was hoped that women would be part of it by coming up with their own media houses. The expectation was that media was going to make the lives of women easier because of digi-media flexibility, thus, easing entry and income opportunity.

Women need to join the digital world. This is because access to the internet exposes women to different areas beyond their relatively restrictive



*Dr. Abena Yeboah-Banin, Senior Lecturer, HoD, Communication Studies, University of Ghana*

**Topic: Technology is not Gender Neutral:  
Exploring the Factors for the ICT Gender  
Gap in Developing Countries**

role that they find themselves in. This can lead them to be economically empowered. There was over-expectation that DigitAll was going to do it all. It was becoming evident that instead of bridging the gap it was widening it. The reality remains that most women are still offline; data indicates that 1 in 3 women are offline.

Even when they are able to get online, they struggle because they lack the capacity to explore technology due to burdens of family matters and availability of time or allowance. This limits them from owning their own media platforms.

Many women in the media complain about online violence including trolls, negative comments or even threats regarding content they have uploaded. Also, women need to be equipped with the technical skills to produce their own content and not just rely on men because they might find themselves putting out content through the lenses of men.

In our quest to 'dig it all', we should be mindful of the historical cracks in traditional media and see how to rectify them so that, as women and men join the online space, the problems found offline are not replicated online.

It is important for women to have management competencies. Women in media enterprises have faced a vacuum in management skills, thereby, relying on men. Therefore, relevant bodies should train women to be skilled in their capacities so they are able to identify opportunities and take full advantage of DigitAll.

**'There was over-expectation that DigitAll was going to do it all. It was becoming evident that instead of bridging the gap it was widening it.'**



*Dr. Teresa Kyalo, Senior Lecturer of Entrepreneurship and School of Business Postgraduate Coordinator, Karatina University*

**M**arginalization is not only in ICT but also in other areas like the labour market, job opportunities, decision making and education among others. This has been brought about by norms that tend to value men, historical beliefs that we inherited, ethics and values, socio-economic status, education and attitude.

There are significant gender gaps in internet use with women being the lesser users. The wide gender gap in some countries can be found in urban areas where men are found to have the main control of devices in households. In rural areas, the women own almost nothing as the men are the ones who work and buy almost everything in the household. Therefore, to reduce the gender gap in ICT, there is need to address the cultural beliefs and various ethics and attitudes that discriminate women in society.

There are factors that influence the gender gap in ICT in Kenya;

**Accessibility.** Women's choice of network is restricted as women tend to be price sensitive due to their level of earnings

**Social norms and gender inequality.** The internet is perceived as a risk to the traditional social order or unsafe for women and girls.

**Technophobia.** Women often have complex relationships with technology and machines because, overtime, they have been made to believe that machines and technology are not for women, thus, generating a gender bias. Women, then, shy away from studying or using information technology.

**Lower levels of digital literacy and lack of confidence in ICT.** Girls are not exposed to engineering careers until it is too late for them to take up the appropriate subjects necessary for engineering studies. Women have not been trained to engage in science and technology and the result is that women end up being concentrated in other fields like catering and clerical work with few engaging in computer systems administration and technical development.

**Under-representation of women in development of ICT.** ICT products, solutions and content are often generically designed for men users, with women infrequently involved in development. This leads to female users often seeing no reason to use digital products and engage less with digital solutions.

**Poor motivation and lack of mentors.** In science and engineering, women lack mentors to help them along. The available women facilities in engineering represent a small fraction of the population. Moreover, women have much less developed network in the high tech industries.

There is, therefore, need to address the gender gap by;

i) Policy makers need to identify the various specific challenges and barriers that women face in accessing and using ICT and to develop the appropriate policy response to reduce the gap.

ii) There is need for policy makers to design gender responsive ICT policies that can take into consideration the unique challenges faced by women when it comes to accessing and using technology or the internet. Developing a truly gender-responsive ICT policy starts with the recognition that technology development and use are both subject to existing socio-economic and institutional discrimination.

iii) There should be inclusion of women in the policy designing, formulation and implementation processes.

When all this is done, **R.E.A.C.T** should be applied where this stands for

**Rights.** There should be protection of everyone's rights online regardless of the gender though the women are more likely to be abused. This helps to curb harassment and other forms of abuse online.

**Education.** This should be used to equip everyone, more so women, with the skills they will need to access and use ICT.

**Access.** There should be delivery of affordable and easy to access ICT because women are hindered from using ICT due to how expensive it is.

**Content.** Relevant bodies should ensure relevant and empowering content for women is availed and used. In addition to expanding access opportunities, there is also need to ensure that relevant content is available in local languages and is being created locally. In doing this, the content will remain relevant and useful for local communities and will increase the incentive to spend money and resources on connectivity.

**Targets.** Policy makers should be held accountable. For any policy to be successful, it must be guided by measurable and time-bound targets. This ensures that both end-goals and intermediate targets are linked to specific dates. This also makes all key stakeholders have a clear understanding of the policy's goals and can work to support the realization of these objectives.

Globally, Africa has the highest gender gap when compared to continents like Asia and America. Therefore, the aspect of ICT gender policy cannot be addressed without addressing the general gender gap in Africa. We should look at the roots and not the branches.

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Topic: Ensuring Gender Equality through Innovation and Technology

There is gender inequality due to;

- i) Gender stereotyping due to the rigid culture and religious matters.
- ii) There is low level of education attainment/ high literacy level.iii) Low level of education has led to unequal empowerment and unequal pay and (even bigger) work compared with men, thus, leading to poverty.

Gender equality through innovation and technology's aim is to ensure all genders are at par. There should be equal access to opportunities and resources be it in education, decision making or policy making on equal grounds.

Innovation and technology for gender equity can be applied to;

- ♦ Stop gender stereotyping. Young girls should be mentored early in sciences and technology. Have a strong advocacy at all levels. Women and girls should be involved in global technology revolution.
- ♦ Get everyone involved. There should be increased political, material and financial support for girls and women in STEM.
- ♦ Celebrate women in leadership on social media platforms like face book, Instagram, twitter etc.

As a leader, try and leave a successor to ensure continuity.



*Dr. Anne Lara Ogunsola; Chief Training and Research Fellow National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration. (NIEPA), Ondo, Nigeria*

## Topic: Leaders in Action: Disrupting the Status Quo



*Dr. Teresah Mutahi; Associate Instructional Prof, Associate Dir. and Coordinator, Undergraduate Programmes, University of Florida, USA*

**R**epresentation brings a lot of validation to show one can aim higher and actualize it, thus, leveraging gender equity.

In order to build capacity for girls and women, resources put into place and technological advancement in national and global levels should be considered.

The tenets that have enabled Japan to be a global technological giant are **i)** More focus is put and **ii)** Resource is invested in supporting innovations like robots and other areas.

As a nation and within our institutions, more support is needed in order to encourage innovators.

Institutions can leverage innovation as a way of earning themselves some income. This include patenting their products. This money, in the end,

acts as a motivation to put in more focus and effort.

We need to be action oriented leaders in order to equalize the gender gap. Since technology is expensive, innovators need a boost in order to actualize and also to avoid their products and ideas from being stolen or reproduced.

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Ms. Cylia Kathambi, CEO, Media and Development Communication Specialist, Ekar Communications moderated the panel discussions which dealt with a variety of issues on equity and equality, access of technology in rural areas and . Other panelists were Fr. Dr. Aloysius Lwanga Bukenya, Office of Dean, School of Graduate Studies, Research and Innovations, University of Kisubi, Uganda, Dr. Opeyemi Aderonke Oyekan, Senior Training and Research Fellow, National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, Nigeria and Dr. Margaret Kinyua, Lecturer in Mathematics, School of Pure and Applied Sciences, Karatina University.

### Quotable Quotes

**“It is true that a woman’s duty is centered in her home and motherhood...[but] home should mean the whole country and not be confined to three or four rooms or a city or state”** *Charlotte Gilman*

**“Together we can forge women’s equality. Collectively we can all embrace equity”**  
*Unknown*

**‘Let us make digital technologies work for all.’** *Unknown*