

**Multi stakeholder policy dialogue on the African Girls Can Code
Initiative (AGCCI)**

**Organized on the Occasion of the 53rd session of the Economic
Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance,
Planning and Economic Development
(COM-21)**

21 March 2021- 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM (EAT)

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I. INTRODUCTION

The [African Girls Can CODE Initiative](#) (AGCCI), a partnership between UN Women, African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nation Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The initiative aims to train and empower a minimum of 2000 young girls aged between 17-20 across Africa between the year 2018 and 2022 to become computer programmers, creators and designers, placing them on track to take up studies and careers in the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) sector. The initiative has two key strategies namely: **coding lessons through coding camps and mainstreaming ICT, coding and gender into the national curricula**. Moreover, it promotes the implementation of national media campaigns involving role models (e.g. women in ICT, female teachers in schools) and utilizes an **on-line platform** to enhance networking among the girls, trainers and mentors.

AGCCI side event at COM-21

UN Women in partnership with the AUC, UNECA and ITU co-hosted a side event on “African Girls Can Code Initiative”. The side event brought young girl coders and other key stakeholders with the following objectives:

- Provide a platform for young girl coders to share their innovative initiatives and COVID-19 success stories.
- Promote the role of young women in the growing innovation and development of Africa in line with the theme of COM-21.
- Garner commitment from relevant stakeholders including AU Member States, the UN system, development partners and the private sector to support the initiatives of the African girls who code.

Key outcomes

- Provided a platform for stakeholders to learn about the AGCCI, and innovative actions rolled out by African girls who code.
- Provided a platform for the AGCCI learners to network with key stakeholders and advocate for increased investment in programs and initiatives that support girls who code and gender mainstreaming in ICT.
- Yielded strategic partnership with the private sector who committed to address the digital gender divide through advocacy campaigns and funding IT training centers that ensure equitable participation of young women and men.

II. ATTENDANCE

The policy dialogue brought together 60 participants, including 15 young girl coders and partners from AU Member States, the UN system and the private sector who committed to promote the role of girls and young women in innovation and development in Africa amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Opening Session

The session began with welcome remarks by the moderator Ms. Letty Chiwara, the UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, AU and ECA. Ms. Letty shared her warm greetings and acknowledged the participation of all the speakers from AUC, UNECA and ITU including strategic partners and the Africa Girls Can Code Initiative alumni.

Welcome remarks by:

Ms. Cisse Mariama Mohamed- Director of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development at AUC

Ms. Cisse Mariama Mohamed opened the policy dialogue affirming that the rights and welfare of girls and women remain priority agenda to the Commission and its Member States. The Director stated that this can be observed from the various policies and key instruments of the commission. She emphasized that the commitments made through these policy instruments fundamentally guide the Department's work on enhancing 'the role of girls and women as key players in Africa's sustainable development agenda'.

Ms. Cisse also reaffirmed AUC's commitment towards the African Girls Can Code Initiative's key goal of furthering the empowerment of women and girls throughout Africa by ensuring access to education and employment, and ultimately bridging the gender digital divide. She called for joint efforts in encouraging young girls such as the AGCCI young female Ambassadors to use the opportunity provided through the initiative and the knowledge gained to innovate targeted solutions to problems that continue to affect them and their communities daily.

Ms. Cisse also addressed the issue of Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE) which is rising in Africa not only as a result of the pandemic, as students are learning from home virtually but also due to a combination of rapidly rising connectivity, limited regulation, little awareness, and poverty She further highlighted the work being done under their Harmful Practices Unit guided by the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection 2014 to combat this very timely issue.

Mr. Andrew Rugege- Regional Director, Regional Office for Africa International Telecommunication Union

Mr. Andrew highlighted the importance of partnership in accomplishing the mammoth task of executing their mandate of connecting the world and achieving Gender Equality in the digital age.

The Director stated that half of the 3.7 billion who do not yet have access or not connected are women, the majority being youth and most from Least Developed Countries whereby a

large part of these countries are in Africa. Mr. Andrew recognized that addressing this gender gap can significantly contribute to the continent's economic development. As an example, he cited that closing this gender gap just in mobile ownership and data usage in low- and middle-income countries could generate an annual USD \$15 billion in revenue for mobile operators.

Mr. Jean-Paul Adam, Director, Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division (ECA)

Mr. Jean-Paul called on all stakeholders to 'build forward better' and be more conscious than ever before of the need for society not just return to the status quo as we collectively face the unprecedented impacts of a global pandemic, and seek to adapt and build resilience. He discussed that the pandemic has further illustrated the existing gender gaps in STEM fields, tech industries and access to technology. Mr. Jean- Paul stressed the need to adapt the initiative to the current crises as we combat its many impacts. He stated that we must leverage key moments in 2021 through digitalization – to close the digital gender gap through programmes such as AGCCI and encourage further education and careers in technology”.

Mr. Jean-Paul acknowledged that the collective virtual attendance for this policy dialogue shows the high priority given to '**Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering all Women and Girls**'. Moreover, he reaffirmed that UNECA recognizes Gender Equality as not only a fundamental human right agenda but also an undertaking with a multiplier effect on socio-economic development. He discussed that UNECA is prioritizing the role that the ICT sector plays in realizing agenda 5 of the SDG - which further targets under target 5.b to enhancing the use of ICT to promote the empowerment of women. He highlighted addressing the digital gender gap can for example add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025 and afford the opportunity for women to benefit from upcoming continental initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

He shared one out of the many initiatives, a Hybrid Continental Coding Camp that UNECA has carried out to bridge the gender digital gap. Under the umbrella of UN@75 celebrations the coding camp was organized in December 2020 by UNECA in partnership with the ITU bringing over 3000 girls across the continent from varying socio-economic backgrounds which culminated with an innovation fair that demonstrated incredibly innovative capacity by the young girls.

Mr. Jean-Paul concluded his opening remarks by underlining that gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls can only be achieved with a collective resolve by nations, local and regional organizations, the private sector, UN agencies, parents, teachers, and individuals.

First session: Panel discussion AGCCI stories and innovations (moderated session)

Fatou Ndiaye- AGCCI alumna - Senegal

Ms. Fatou started by acknowledging the coding skills she gained from the AGCCI coding camp. Utilizing her skills, she shared a new project she designed called "[Baanabaana](#)". Baanabaana is a start-up company launched by young and dynamic student entrepreneurs, whose guiding principle is active participation for sustainable development and the fight against poverty, especially unemployment. It is an e-commerce platform that provides digital marketing and where entrepreneurs can sell their products.

Ms Fatou's goals are to empower young entrepreneurs and promote the use of digital technology among young sellers. Thus far, she has finalized the project study of Baanabaana, designed the mobile application that would be available on both Play Store and Apple Store and identified vendors that are committed to using the platform for their businesses.

Thereza Joseph- AGCCI alumna- Tanzania

Ms. Thereza stated that the AGCCI coding camp which she took part in 2018 was a very impactful experience. Upon returning from the coding camp, her mission was to spread the knowledge with her community and inspire other girls to consider computer science and coding as a career path. As such, she proceeded to achieve her mission through gathering her friends and some of her family members and teaching them the lessons she learned from the coding camp.

Additionally, Ms. Thereza expressed that her second mission was to use her knowledge to create [animation videos](#) which can be disseminated on different platforms to create awareness on numerous societal issues. However, she shared different hindrances she faces such as lack of sufficient internet accessibility, learning resources as computer and awareness of the society. Ms. Thereza expressed that society is not open and aware of the potential of young girls in the ICT industry and that young girls and women can also perform well and succeed. She plans to face this challenge head on by being part of the awareness creation and help build the African we want.

Malerato Mphahlele- AGCCI alumna -South Africa

Ms. Malerato shared a video of her discussing the robotics class she started at her school. In her video she stated that the aim of the robotics class is to equip young women with necessary skills to lead the 4th industrial revolution. She started a coding club that gathers once a week, where she shares her knowledge of coding with the club members.

Despite the limitation that her and her peers in the coding club faced in terms of resource including access to technology, Ms. Malerato stated that they were able to come up with ideas that can help solve and spread awareness about issues they are passionate about. She also emphasized that this exercise allowed the young girls at her school to submerge themselves

in ICT and consider it a feasible career path. She further stated that as the world is changing, and ICT becomes the way of the future the youth should change with it.

Ms. Malerato concluded her presentation by sharing her plans of joining the IT industry and inspiring and teaching others to do the same. She expressed that she wants to establish initiatives similar to AGCCI in her country and eventually for the continent. She wants to ensure that technology is mainstreamed, and more opportunities are created for young women to make a relevant contribution in the industry.

Murielle Iradukunda- AGCCI alumna- Burundi

Ms. Murielle recently had an opportunity to work with her classmate on a project offered by Makerere University where they decided to focus on programming under the project title "***Use of image recognition in the detection of cassava diseases***". Ms. Murielle explained that Cassava is an important plant in Africa as it is largely cultivated and consumed. Unfortunately, it can be attacked by several diseases, the most widespread being Mosaic Virus, and frequently causes a huge loss of harvest.

While developing her project, she used the dataset provided by Makerere University, Kampala in a competition on the Kaggle platform and a library widely used in artificial intelligence. The image recognition was based on Deep Learning, a sub-category of Machine Learning, which referred to a set of techniques and technologies of automatic learning, based on artificial neural networks. Additionally, Murielle and her classmate have used "***MNIST***" which is one of the most used examples in Machine Learning, it is a speedy and efficient number recognition algorithm.

Ms. Murielle concluded her presentation by acknowledging the enriching experience she gained from the initiative, emphasizing how it helped her discover her new passion of being an ICT programmer and appreciating the opportunity to learn different programming languages. She further encouraged the AGCCI learners taking part in the dialogue to make the best out of the AGCCI and continue to share their innovation.

Ms. Lidya Berhanu- AGCCI alumna- Ethiopia

Ms. Lidya began her presentation by acknowledging the positive impacts of the initiative and its benefits beyond the coding learning. She went on to mention that the initiative instilled in her confidence, the principles of teamwork and afforded her a platform for cultural exchange and build friendships. Ms. Lidya further expressed her gratitude for the platform that was created via this camp to learn from other professional women and stated that it was "confidence boosting".

Ms. Lidya shared her experience of creating a maternal aid application that she developed with four other teammates from Ethiopia and Cameroon and announced that the app was the winner of the Internet of Things (IOT) competition. The winning application monitors the

heartbeat of a fetus in a mother's womb. The application also has an inbuilt Global Positioning System (GPS) that allows incoming ambulance to easily locate the mother.

Ms. Lidya concluded her presentation emphasizing and acknowledging the great opportunity she was afforded through AGCCI and by sharing her optimism towards future innovations and asked participants to stay tuned!

Ms. Ruth Lulu Ayalew- AGCCI alumna- Ethiopia

Ms. Ruth shared the expertise and knowledge she gained through the coding camp she took part in in December of 2020. She mentioned that in addition to being introduced to the concept of coding, she also learned about the agenda 2063 and its goals for the Africa we want. She expressed that the initiative made her feel empowered as a young woman in ICT.

As part of the IOT competition, Ms. Ruth along with her teammates created a code that can inform a robot/machine to design reusable, environmentally friendly water bottles. This innovation was in part an effort to address the current environmental concern of Africa and the world at large, through eliminating plastic water bottles. Upon completing the camp program and competition, she is working with companies with support from ECA to develop the initiative further.

Ms. Ruth following her AGCCI camp experience, has started teaching her peers the importance and basics of ICT and coding. She thus stressed the importance of empowering women to insure they excel in the industry.

Second session: Dialogue with strategic partners on AGCCI and the continental girls in ICT STEM agenda: Taking stock of relevant interventions and entry points for collaboration. (moderated session)

Mr. Andrew Rugege, moderator of the second session opened the dialogue congratulating and appreciating the girl coders who shared their innovations.

Ms. Hendrina Chalwe Doroba (African Development Bank)

Question: What are the available strategic financing options for closing the gender digital divide in Africa? What the African Development Bank (AfDB) initiatives can concretely provide entry points for collaboration in supporting the implementation of the AGCCI in AU Member States?

Ms. Doroba shared an array of opportunities for engagement and financing in AfDB.

1. AfDB has put in place several instruments to support Regional Member Countries (RMC) to implement educational skill development agendas. The bank implements a policy-based operation that supports RMCs in promoting structure reforms, enhancing sector

governance and promoting policy dialogue within the education sector. Thus, Ms. Doroba stated there is an opportunity to engage in policy dialogue with the AGCCI and Member Countries to influence integration of girls coding into the curriculum at Technical and Vocational Education and Training level or high education level particularly in the countries where the initiative has proven to be successful.

2. AfDB provides support to RMCs through investment projects on education. This project can be submitted to the bank through the relevant ministries such as Ministry of higher education or Ministry of IT that is leading the particular project. Against this, Ms. Deroba stated that there is an opportunity for engagement whereby submissions can include projects that could enhance and support the success of girl coders. She further emphasized that the partners should ensure to engage at the country level to tap into this opportunity.
3. The bank has an initiative called Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa (AFAWA), a fund put in place to support women entrepreneurs. In this regards Ms. Doroba noted, the coders' entrepreneurial innovations could benefit from this funding opportunity and advised this funding opportunity is well suited to support the visions they shared in their earlier presentation.

Ms. Doroba also briefly presented on two entry points for collaboration:

1. **Coding for employment initiatives:** AfDB partnered with Microsoft to equip youth with demand driven coding skills. The initiative has three pillars; 1- ensuring access to digital infrastructure; 2- ensuring access to demand driven ICT and entrepreneurial skills 3- ensuring access to the job market. The initiative has been implemented in 5 countries: Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. Ms. Hendrina encouraged the girl coders, particularly those from the listed countries to engage with her or directly with the bank to become beneficiaries of the initiative. She also mentioned that the bank has center of excellence in all of the 5 countries where they offer the girl coders space to practice their skills and further develop their ideas.
2. The bank is also developing a new strategy on 'skills for direct jobs' to expand the infrastructure of digital and online learning which Ms. Hendrina recommended that this can be another entry point for the girl coders to expand their learning and career development.

Ms. Ghada Khalifa (Microsoft)

Question: Please share successful examples from your sector on efforts to strengthen equitable access to ICT and technologies for girls and women in Africa. Also suggest few proposals for effective collaborations with ICT service providers and current entry points for collaboration with the AGCCI.

Ms. Ghada expressed that Microsoft is keen to address the gender equity gap particularly in ICT and empowering women to engage in economic opportunities. She shared two Microsoft focus areas in addressing the gender equity gap in ICT:

Microsoft has put in place an initiative to encourage young girls' participation in the IT sector and related areas through educating them and their parents. The initiative operates in different platforms such as schools and through collaboration with organizations such as Forum for African women Educationalist (FAWE) in Kenya and in Nigeria.

Microsoft conducts campaigns across Africa to educate young women. Ms. Ghada in this regard underlined the importance of addressing cultural misconceptions about young women pursuing careers in ICT and STEM, as it has been proven to be amongst the main challenge hindering the engagement of young girls in the IT industry.

Microsoft also works with young women entering the employment field by supporting access to opportunities in IT. Additionally, Ms. Ghada shared that Microsoft launched an initiative in March to provide a condensed training programme on digital and IT skills for young women regardless of their educational background. The initiative will be rolled out physically in 5 countries starting with Nigeria and online across all of Africa. She added that Microsoft has focused in providing access to online learning during this pandemic where students are mainly learning online.

Ms. Ghada concluded by stating that there are entry points for collaboration with the African Girls Can Code Initiative particularly in education and digital learning.

Mr. Mactar Seck (UNECA)

Question: What are key enablers to successful UN system action to increase women and girls' role and leadership in ICT and innovation? Share strategic UNECA initiatives and their contribution to AGCCI and other programs.

Mr. Seck acknowledged the positive impact around the initiative of empowering young girls, and he shared different initiatives that UNECA has already put in place for women and girls to utilize ICT and unleash their potentials.

UNECA has set up a digital center of excellence based on Digital Identity, Trade and Economy to prepare African countries to be ready for the 4th Industrial Revolution where women and young girls will play the key role in promoting Africa's sustainable industrialization through digitalization. Within the same context, Mr. Seck mentioned that this year UNECA jointly with AUC, UN Women and ITU organized the second continental ICT hybrid coding camp for girls from all over the continent who participated virtually whereas girls from Addis Ababa were physically present in UNECA. The hybrid coding camp was an opportunity for the young women to come together and learn to code using the Scratch program. The aim of the coding

camp was to expose young African girls to digital literacy skills, coding and programming, and showcase innovations and projects of the young innovators. During the session, 35 projects were developed and presented by the young girls among which 5 projects were selected for implementation. The selected 5 projects have been nominated for the "**African Business Heroes**" competition. Mr. Seck on behalf of UNECA recognized the need for multi-stakeholder partnership with partners such as UN Women and ITU and private sectors to scale these initiatives at the continental level in a more streamlined way.

UNECA has started engaging on initiatives such as education and capacity building of young girls across the continent through the online program which will be launched on April 22 at the Center of Excellence. The programme aims to ensure young girls acquire necessary knowledge in digital coding. The program will have online courses focusing on capacity building for girls in coding, cyber security issues, and tackling issues related to harassment and how girls can effectively work online.

Mr. Boubakar Yougbare (AU/CIEFFA)

Question: Please share three key accelerators of gender responsive STEM education in Africa. What AU CIEFFA initiatives can catalyze the girls in ICT agenda?

Mr. Yougbare shared as part of CIEFFA efforts to accelerate gender responsive STEM education, they are implementing continental strategy for education in Africa. In this regard, in partnership with FAWE and UNICEF, CIEFFA developed a Gender Equality Strategy for the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) which provides detailed accounts of how African governments can bridge the gender gap in STEM education. The strategy calls for creative confidence in technology for girls and boys through education.

Mr. Yougbare stressed the need to change how we teach STEM in the classroom and outside and to make it more relatable and holistic for girls. He discussed the importance of linking STEM studies to the interests and desires of girls and young women & showing them how STEM can help them impact their communities and the world and accelerate gender-responsive STEM education.

Mr. Yougbare expressed that the AU CIEFFA looks forward to engaging with AGCCI and its partners to explore areas of collaboration and acknowledged the work that has been done so far through the initiative. Similar to the initiative he discussed, CIEFFA has been organizing since 2017 youth capacity-building workshops and hackathons targeted at African youth working at the grassroots level. The workshop aims to empower youth to be change makers and contribute to the advancements of their community. It was also CIEFFA's vision to equip young girl through the workshop with tools that help advance and increase their engagement in data and digital intelligence. He stated that this will help close the gender gap and dismantle the gender biases that hinder young girls and women from entering the industry.

The capacity building training has brought young women and girls from across the continent who are learning, working or teaching in different STEM fields to share their experience with each other. They also received computer science and digital skills training such as graphic design, coding, digital financial literacy, and digital content creation. The trainees were empowered through this engagement to return to their homes and share their knowledge with other young women looking to pursue a career in IT and STEM fields.

Mr. Yougbare briefly shared about the virtual stakeholder dialogue that CIEFFA organized at the margins of 'Botswana international education fair' which took place online in 2020. The education fair is an annual event organized to spotlight innovation in the continent. The platform can provide the girl coders an opportunity to promote the work they have been doing and receive an investment up to \$30,000 to continue expanding on their innovations.

Mr. Yougbare also mentioned the strategy currently under development by CIEFFA for the years 2021-2025 will give ample opportunities for capacity building trainings of girls across the continent in specific topics. He closed his presentation by reiterating AU CIEFFA's interest in partnering on the Africa Girls Can Code Initiative and that they look forward to collaborating with partners from different sectors who are engaging in initiatives that are creating platforms for young girl to advance in ICT and STEM.

Ms. Horore Bell Bebga African Women in Tech Start-up (AfricanWiTS)

Question: Please share successful examples of how your organization is empowering women and girls to pursue their career in ICT and entrepreneurship. How can the African girls who code benefit from opportunities available in your organization?

Ms. Horore Bell Bega is the founder of African Women in Tech Startups (AfricanWiTS) which is a TECH HUB that support women and girls in Cameroon and Africa. Its role is to support young girls to advance their technological careers within the ICT sector.

Ms. Horore stated the objectives of AfricanWiTS are; bridging the digital gender divide, enhancing the employability of young girls in the digital field and cyber security and increasing digital financial inclusion of women. She also stressed that since 2016, her organization has initiated 3 main programs that train women and young girls in digital coding. The first program gave opportunity for 50 women to participate and learn how to launch their digital start-up project. Additionally, Ms. Horore mentioned they organized an event titled "Festival of Cameroonian Women" organized at the margins of Women's Day celebration. The event gathered around 300 women and girls to equip them with skills related to science and technology fields.

Lastly, she expressed that AfricanWiTS supports girls participating in different international competitions. For example, in the year 2020 AfricanWiTS supported a team of 10 girl coders who participated in an international competition called "Tech Campus" and won.

Hatoumata Magassa (Orange)

Question: Please share successful examples from your sector on efforts to strengthen equitable access to ICT and technologies for girls and women in Africa. Also suggest few proposals for effective collaborations with ICT service providers and current entry points for collaboration with the AGCCI?

Ms. Hatoumata Magassa, Director of Orange Digital Center in Ethiopia shared that Orange Digital Center brings together programs supporting youth and entrepreneurship. There are youth empowerment programmes that provide trainings for start-ups and support start-up acceleration. She mentioned that Orange Digital Center is a place where young girls can get opportunities for training, internships programs, potential jobs opportunities and gain support in developing their start-up projects. Orange Digital Center ensures that their programme targets at least 40% women in their effort to address youth employability. Moreover, Orange makes deliberate effort to include more women and girls in ICT jobs while improving the targeted countries' sustainable growth and digital transformation.

Ms. Magassa concluded her speech by saying that the Orange Digital Center looks forward to engaging further with AGCCI and its partners to explore areas of collaboration in training young girls on jobs related to digital skills and enhance their employability.

Khady Fall Tall, AFAO (L'Association des Femmes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest)

Ms. Khady Fall, is the president of AFAO (West African Women's Association) which is a regional women's organization that brings together 16 countries in the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) region. Ms. Khady expressed that AFAO advocates, lobbies and implements activities for the economic and technical empowerment of women and girls in West Africa to easily access employment.

Ms. Fall mentioned that AFAO focuses on capacity building and empowerment of women and young girls who have not had formal education. AFAO encourages the women and girls to familiarize themselves with e-marketing and be able to market their products online.

She concluded by stating the need for initiatives that build capacity of young women who have start-ups but may not necessarily have had access to formal education.

Third session: Interactive session

During the moderated interactive session the following questions were raised by AGCCI alumni and participants:

- Will there be any financial assistance from the partners to support in scaling up the coders' initiatives?

How could partners support these young girls considering the fact that internet connectivity is a major challenge in the communities where the girls come from? How can women from rural areas benefit from these types of initiatives?

In response, Mr. Mactar shared information on an ongoing platform set up by Ministry of Digital Economy and Telecommunications in Senegal to help young girls with their projects and provided the contact of the focal person, Ms. Fatou Coudoul who can give all the necessary guidance and support.

Additionally, he explained that from United Nation's side, UNECA is already working with Alibaba on different initiative under project "Africa's Business Heroes". The project promotes and supports young girls' entry into coding and ICT sector, and helps young girls implement their projects.

Mr. Mactar shared that UNECA and ITU's have jointly set up an online platform in Rwanda that allows women and young girls to market their products in their local language (Kinyarwanda).

Moreover, he mentioned that UNECA is working together with Google for the development of on an e- market that could benefit women from rural areas in selling their products without any charges. He concluded his intervention by reaffirming UNECA's commitment for innovative projects that involves women and girls.

Closing Remarks

During the closing, Ms. Letty Chiwara, UN Women Ethiopia representative to the AU and ECA thanked all partners and guests for their full participation and called for joint effort to ensure women and girls are strategic contributors to development in Africa. She shared that the key take away from the AGGCI learners' presentation is that efforts and stakeholders' interventions must now shift from training and capacity building to creating opportunity. Opportunities to be entrepreneurs and pursue careers in the ICT industry. Ms. Letty stated that partners' discussions clearly demonstrated the need for joint efforts to address the agenda of gender in ICT. She affirmed, digitalization offers many opportunities for young girls from helping to end poverty, improving education, health and agriculture productivity to creating decent jobs. Involving young girls in ICT could also be an accelerator for economic development in Africa and achieving the Africa we want.

Ms. Letty highlighted some recommendations captured from the discussions for way forward;

1. We must Increase the level of women representation, participation and leadership in the spheres of media, STEM and ICT.
2. We need to put systems in place to collect data, monitor and evaluate progress of participation and representation of women and girls in the ICT sector. Accordingly, we can implement the technology developed by the young girls themselves like those

presented. It is noted, the girl learners can be the ones to drive the data collection and help create the tools to collect the data and make it usable and accessible.

3. It is fundamental to identify the barriers that prevent girls from joining careers in STEM, some of which were shared by the girl learner and once identified we must work towards solutions. As some of the girls shared, they have begun to take actions to remove some of the existing barriers.
4. We need to devise sustainable initiatives that empower girls through training and mentorship to ensure they engage in ICT careers such as those opportunities shared by partners like Microsoft, Orange and AfDB. We must open the door for young girls to engage in the works being carried out.
5. We need to promote gender responsive STEM education which recognizes and responds to the specific learning styles and need of young girls in order to attract girls to the sector such as those shared by AU CIEFFA. We need also to continue to work on mainstreaming gender in ICT curriculum among all African countries.
6. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are key to closing the gender divide in ICT and encourage young girls to join the ICT sector.

She concluded the dialogue calling for a renewed commitment to the African Girls Can Code Initiative: to ensure the full participation of women and girls in STEM. Ms. Chiwara stated the need to design sustainable initiatives that empower girls through training and mentorship and encourage them to pursue leadership positions in science careers underlining that supporting girls in science today means they mentor more girls tomorrow. She affirmed that UN Women is ready to strength these partnerships with UNECA, ITU and the private sectors and under the leadership of the AUC to advocate for policies that mainstream ICT and STEM into national curriculum but most importantly, to see our African girls at the forefront of the continent development using technology and what they have learned.

Mr. Jean-Paul on behalf of Ms. Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of UNECA, stated that the commission will use the various recommendations from the dialogue to further refine the way they deliver the coding camps such as the upcoming coding camps that they will jointly host with AUC, UN Women, ITU and UNESCO in Congo and Cameroon though which they hope to reach thousands of more young girls. Mr. Jean-Paul mentioned that UNECA has recently signed an agreement with the government of Congo to establish a regional center on artificial intelligence to provide skills in emerging technologies in the continent. He shared that they hope such regional centers will nurture local talents in a sustainable manner and in particular empower young women and girls.

Mr. Jean-Paul underscored that this also links in with ECA's work on digital identity. To truly empower young women and girls he stated that we need to make sure we reach them wherever they are whether in rural areas or urban centers. To achieve this, Mr. Jean-Paul said that we need to work closely with government to target training programmes and ensure access to finance and relevant support.

Mr. Jean-Paul also touched on ECA's continental level efforts to combat the impact of COVID-19 and put in place response measures that empower start-ups through the digital space. He shared the success seen through the African COVID-19 information platform built on existing mobile phones technology in different countries to allow quick and efficient sharing of information around COVID-19. And the African medical supplies platform that has created space for e-commerce is certainly empowering women and girls through e-commerce space leveraging the Africa Continental free trade area. He further affirmed that women entrepreneurs in the digital space represent one of the best enablers to accelerate action on SDGs and also the AU's digital strategy.

In conclusion, Mr. Jean-Paul called for a joint effort to empower women and girls, to provide access to training, to advance their access to finance and to further accelerate the momentum generated by the African girls can cod initiative.

ANNEXURES

Annex 1:

AGENDA

Multi stakeholder policy dialogue on the African Girls Can Code Initiative (AGCCI)

Organized on the Occasion of the 53rd session of the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (COM-21)

21 March 2021- 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM (EAT)

Moderator: Mme. Letty Chiwara- UN Women Ethiopia Representative, to the AU and UNECA

Opening Session: African young women's role in the context of the 53rd COM-21 theme

02.00 - 02.10

Welcome remarks by (3 Minutes each)

- Mme. Cisse Mariama Mohamed- Director for Social Affairs (AUC-DSA)
 - Mr. Andrew Rugege- Regional Director, Regional Office for Africa International Telecommunication Union
 - Mr. Jean-Paul Adam, Director, Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division (ECA)
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Session I-

02.10 – 03.00

Panel discussion AGCCI stories and innovations

Moderator: Mme. Letty Chiwara, UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, AU and UNECA

Panelists:

- I. Fatou Ndiaye- Senegal
- II. Thereza Joseph- Tanzania
- III. Malerato Mphahlele- South Africa
- IV. Murielle Iradukunda- Burundi
- V. Ms. Lidya Berhanu- Ethiopia
- VI. Ms. Ruth Lulu Ayalew- Ethiopia

03.00 – 03.10

Q&A

**Session 2-
03.10 – 04.00**

***Dialogue with strategic partners on AGCCI and the continental girls in ICT, STEM
agenda: Taking stock of relevant interventions and entry points for collaboration
(Moderator: Mr. Andrew Rugege- Regional Director, Regional Office for Africa- ITU)***

Speakers:

Ms. Ghada Khalifa (Microsoft)

Mme. DOROBA Hendrina Chalwe (AfDB)

Mr. Mactar Seck (UNECA)

Mr. Boubakar Yougbare and Ms. Anoziva Marindire (CIEFFA)

Mme Horore Bell Bega African Women in Tech Start-up (AfricanWITIS)

Hatoumata Magassa (Orange)

04.00 – 04.20

Interactive session and consensus on key commitments

***Moderator: Ms. Nena Thundu- Coordinator of the AU Campaign to End Child
Marriage***

04.20 – 04.30

Closing Session:

Mme. Letty Chiwara- UN Women Ethiopia Representative, to the AU and UNECA

Mme Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary, UNECA (TBC)

Annex2:

Priorities for urgent action: Key messages

- Mainstreaming gender perspective in ICT is a sustainable pathway towards the empowerment of women and girls through information and communication technologies and thus, advance gender equality and women's social and economic empowerment.
- ICTs offer vast potential for women and girls: from ending poverty, to improving education and health, to agricultural productivity, and creating decent jobs. Their involvement and leadership in driving the tech sector is central accelerator of social and economic development in Africa.
- The enactment of regulatory frameworks to protect girls from online sexual exploitation and ensure access to safe content is critical step to address online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls perpetuated by the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Multi-stakeholder and strategic partnerships are requisites to closing the gender divide, overturning stereotypes and encouraging women and girls to use ICTs and pursue careers in technology.
- Data disaggregated by sex and in-depth analysis on the state of gender digital gap essential to inform policies and programmes for increased participation of women in STEM-related education and employment sectors at national and regional levels in Africa.

For more information:

UN Women Africa news: <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/03/partners-of-african-girls-can-code-commit-to-address-the-digital-gender-divide-in-africa>

UN Women Africa twitter:

<https://twitter.com/unwomenethiopia/status/1373600295721299972>