

Draft Concept Note

Rome-based Agencies' International Women's Day 2023

DigitALL - Innovation and technology for gender equality:

***Leveraging the transformative power of inclusive digitalization and innovation
for rural women and girls***

8 March 2023

FAO headquarters - Sheikh Zayed Centre

10:00 – 12:00 hours

Background

International Women's Day (IWD) is a global day to commemorate and uphold women's achievements, raise awareness on the challenges and reconfirm commitment to gender equality. It also marks a call to action for accelerating gender equality. The United Nations theme for IWD 2023 is “**DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality**” and it is aligned with the United Nations 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women priority theme ‘Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls’.

This year's IWD theme recognizes and celebrates the women and girls who are championing the advancement of transformative technology and digital education. It also explores the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities, while acknowledging the role that bold, transformative actions, inclusive technologies, and accessible education can play in accelerating gender equality and creating new opportunities to benefit women and men equally.

Every year the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) join forces to commemorate the International Women's Day to reiterate their commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women, and to discuss practical approaches and policy recommendations for addressing the current and ongoing challenges. This year's high-level event will be one of the RBA's joint efforts that will demonstrate their long-standing commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality. The event will provide an opportunity for the RBAs to present key findings about the current status of rural women in agrifood systems, highlight how innovation and digitization can and are advancing gender equality, and offer policy recommendations to accelerate progress.

On this occasion, the RBAs will welcome members, policy makers and colleagues to recognize and celebrate women's achievements, particularly those that capitalize on the transformative power of inclusive innovation for achieving food security and nutrition, which are critical to foster gender equality and rural women's empowerment for current and future generations.

2023 Theme

The digital transformation is evolving at an exponential pace and is impacting entire systems of agrifood production, management and governance. Digital agriculture has the potential to play a significant role in

achieving global food security and nutrition, reducing poverty, and improving livelihoods especially in rural areas, by offering various value propositions.¹

Digital technology could also support gender equality in agrifood systems by addressing the various constraints undermining women's participation in agrifood value chains and by providing new means and channels for women's socio-economic empowerment. Examples of specific areas in which digital tools could be leveraged to create gains for rural women and girls include digitally enabled extension and advisory services (EAS), farm management and farm operations, digital financial services, and e-digital platforms for e-commerce.

However, the rapid proliferation of digital tools and services stands in stark contrast to the persistence of many systemic and structural barriers to technology access and adoption that many women are still facing. Furthermore, the digital gap is persisting, as recent statistics show that rural usage is particularly lagging and the share of Internet users in urban areas is twice as high as in rural areas².

Available evidence on the gender gap indicates that globally, 69 percent of men are using the Internet compared with 63 percent of women³. Women in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) are 16 percent less likely to use mobile internet than men and progress in reducing the mobile internet gender gap has stalled.⁴ Rural women are particularly disadvantaged in terms of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) access and less likely to engage with ICT solutions, due to constraints such as affordability, illiteracy, user capabilities, and discriminatory social norms.⁵

Given the perceived benefits that digital transformation can bring to the rural sector, ensuring inclusive access to digital technologies and education that benefit men and women equally is crucial in reducing gender inequalities and unleashing rural women's potential. Under this premise, governments and development organizations are now calling for digital inclusion for all. While digitalization on its own cannot solve all the gender-related disadvantages women face as economic and social agents, if introduced properly it can improve women's ability to act effectively and productively in agrifood systems.

This year's IWD theme leverages on the idea that by embracing new technologies and advancing women's and girls' skills and knowledge, progress towards gender equality and rural women's empowerment can be accelerated. Gender-sensitive solutions would also benefit the digital agricultural transformation process itself, by increasing the number of women users, promoting women as tech leaders and motivating technology developers to expand innovative solutions.

Thus, the event will bring together thought leaders, policy practitioners and change makers who are working on innovation to create new social, economic and cultural conditions for a gender equal future in the rural areas and beyond. The event will serve also as an opportunity to share some novel insights

¹ OECD (2018). Going Digital in a Multilateral World. An Interim Report to Ministers. Paris. Available at www.oecd.org/mcm/documents/C-MIN-2018-6-EN.pdf

² ITU (2022). Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2022. <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/facts-figures-2022/>

³ Ibid

⁴ GSMA (2022). The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022. <https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2022.pdf>

⁵ Isenberg, S. (2019). Investing in information and communication technologies to reach gender equality and empower rural women. Rome, FAO. 72 pp. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

from the upcoming FAO Status of Rural Women in Agrifood systems report, which also explores the gender gap in digital agriculture transformation.

Objectives of the event

- Raise awareness of the importance of promoting inclusive and equitable access to digital technologies for rural women and girls and discuss policy solutions that tackle the constraints to women’s technology adoption.
- Highlight the achievements of rural women, in particular those related to digital literacy, digital skills and agripreneurship.
- Discuss how innovation, digitalization and inclusion have the power to positively disrupt “business as usual” and accelerate gender equality in rural areas.
- Reaffirm the RBAs’ commitment to inclusive digital agrifood transformation, by building the digital capabilities of rural women and youth, enhancing their uptake of digital technologies and innovations, and stimulating policies and programmes to tackle the barriers that women and girls face.

Key Messages

- Gender disparities in access to ICTs, although still significant, are slowly closing: between 2017 and 2021, 60 percent of women in low and middle income countries have access to mobile internet (compared to 44 percent in 2017). However, women continue to be more digitally excluded than men, particularly if they live in rural areas.
- Comprehensive policies and programmes that take gender and other socioeconomic determinants into consideration are key to bridging the gap between women and men in agrifood systems and enhancing their ability to benefit equitably from ICTs.
- To tackle the digital gender gap effectively, ICT strategies, policies, plans and budgets need to explicitly address rural women’s needs, preferences, circumstances, and capabilities.

Draft Agenda

10.00 - 10.05 hours	Welcome FAO
10.05 - 10.35 hours	Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. QU Dongyu, Director-General, FAO - Video statement • Valerie Guarnier, Deputy Executive Director, WFP • Ms. Jyotsn Puri, Associate Vice President, IFAD • H.E. Mietani Chauke, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations organizations
10.35 - 11.50 hours	Panel discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Technologies that are alleviating the burden of agricultural labor</i> Ms. Kusum Balsaraf, General Manager, Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM) • <i>Engaging women and youth for soil health using digital technologies</i> Ms. Su Stephanou, Founder of Green Dreams and iCow

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How digital technologies are increasing small-scale farmers' productivity</i> Ms. Claudia Carbajal Morelos, Director, Precision Development • <i>The digital divide: latest findings and policy interventions to address the gender gap</i> Ms. Isabelle Carboni, Insights Director, Digital Inclusion, Mobile for Development, GSMA • <i>The business case for gender equality – using digital technologies and working with men in gender transformative business models</i> Mr. Cesar Maita Azpiri, Senior Innovation Manager, Global Gender unit at IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative <p>Moderator: Ms. Katherine Wilson, Moderator, writer and commentator</p>
11.50 hours	Closing