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PRESS STATEMENT

“DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality”

Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), a non-partisan national network of women’s rights organizations and activists striving for the rights of women and girls, joins the rest of the world in commemorating International Women’s Day, in this women’s month. This year’s theme, **“DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality”** speaks to the need for institutions to invest in the drive for gender equality which is not only a fundamental human right but a keystone of a prosperous, modern economy that provides sustainable inclusive growth. In Zimbabwe and the world over, bridging the ICT gender gap remains prudent as a salient barrier:

- Women and girls are less aware of mobile internet compared with men, and this significantly limits their uptake. For instance, according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), in [2013](#), only 37% of all women were online, compared to 41% of all men. In [2017](#), the global internet penetration rate for men stood at 50.9% compared to 44.9% for women. This increased in [2019](#), with the proportion of women using the internet globally standing at 48%, compared to 58% of men. In [2022](#), 62% of men were using the internet compared to 57% of women, meaning that the global internet use gender gap stands at 8%. However, this divide is more glaring in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), many of which are in Africa, where only 19% of women used the internet in 2020, compared to 86% in the developed world.
- Secondly, women’s access to digital platforms is limited due to online violence. According to Plan International’s report on the State of the World’s Girls, 2020, more than half of girls (58 percent), said they experience online violence on social media, which impacts their continued participation in the digital space and consequently cuts them off from the benefits of using ICTs. Access remains critical to achieving digital inclusion.
- Last but not least, the high cost of data to access the internet and social media platforms makes it less attractive for women to fully engage on digital platforms.

As such, women and girls-designed gender-responsive approaches to innovation, technology, and digital education are urgent. Now is the time for advancements in digital technology to offer immense opportunities to address development and humanitarian challenges. This position is reinforced by several instruments such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), African Platform for Action, the Dakar Declaration of 1994, the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, the Sustainable Development Goals call for the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of women’s rights and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Therefore, this year as we join hands with the world to commemorate International Women’s Day, we urge:

- i. The Government of Zimbabwe to urgently strengthen implementation, oversight, and adequate resourcing for legislative, policy, infrastructure, administrative, and practical measures to address the existing structural inequalities in income, education, and employment opportunities, and stem the political, economic, legal, cultural, technological, and social barriers that lead to the exclusion of women and girls from accessing and using the internet and ICT.
 - ii. The Government of Zimbabwe, in particular, The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to Prioritize Education and tertiary education transformation to ensure enabling learning infrastructure, human-centered development-based curriculum, and mass human rights-based and gender-responsive digital literacy as it is evidently an increasingly essential skill for business opportunities, employability and has been linked to higher earning potential and new economic opportunities for the country at large.
 - iii. The Government of Zimbabwe in partnership with other stakeholders such as the Zimbabwe Republic Police, the justice delivery sector, and internet service providers to enforce the legal tenets of the Data Protection Act [Chapter 11:12], and to address the increasing problem of online violence against women and girls.
 - iv. Postal and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe to Monitor and regulate service providers in line with compatible data packages that are affordable and seek to address the gender-digital divide
 - v. The Private sector and mobile service providers, industry, and tech companies: to strengthen their business model in pursuit of women and girls’ rights-centered strategies that promote women and girls’ digital inclusion and seek to bridge the gender-digital divide., including offering data packages that are affordable and responsive to the economic vulnerabilities of women, needs of women with disabilities and other marginalized groups in society.
- i. All stakeholders (public and private): to collect, and share gender and age disaggregated data embracing intersectionality profiling on access and use of ICT in order to help track and evaluate progress and shape policies geared towards promoting the enjoyment of digital rights by women and girls in their diversities in the country.
 - ii. Development partners and civil society: to ensure digital empowerment for girls, young women, and women in all their diversity through investing in awareness of laws, policies, and opportunities for access to ICT, strengthening response and access to justice to address online violence against women and girls, to invest in digital literacy programs for women and girls, and to prioritize development that seeks to promote women and girls’ digital inclusion.

#EmbraceEquity