



GENDER-RESPONSIVE TOOLKIT FOR DIGITAL INNOVATION HUBS IN GHANA



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List of Acronyms

AWIT	–	African Women in Technology
CEDAW	–	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	–	Civil Society Organization
DIH	–	Digital Innovation Hub
GIZ	–	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Development Cooperation)
ICT	–	Information and Communication Technology
IFC	–	International Finance Corporation
ILO	–	International Labour Organization
M&E	–	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	–	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MoU	–	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	–	Non-Governmental Organization
PWD	–	Person with Disability
PVO	–	Private Voluntary Organization
SDG	–	Sustainable Development Goal
STEM	–	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UN	–	United Nations
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	–	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	–	United States Agency for International Development
WES	–	Women Entrepreneurs Support



1

Introduction



Introduction

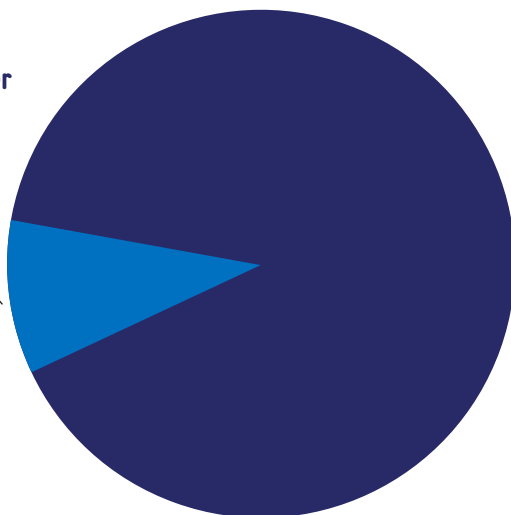
➔ 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

The purpose of this toolkit is to support Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) in Ghana in integrating gender-responsiveness into both their internal structures and external activities. This is in recognition of the critical role that digital innovation hubs play in shaping the entrepreneurial, technological and digital transformation landscape of Ghana. Thus, this toolkit offers resources necessary for digital innovation hubs to effectively integrate gender into their practices. The toolkit also provides evidence-based tools, templates, and case studies, and recommendations drawn from across Ghana and beyond, to help make the hub spaces more inclusive and genderresponsive. It will enable the digital innovation hubs to move further along the gender integration continuum, that is, from being gender aware or gender-sensitive to gender-responsive and gender-transformative.

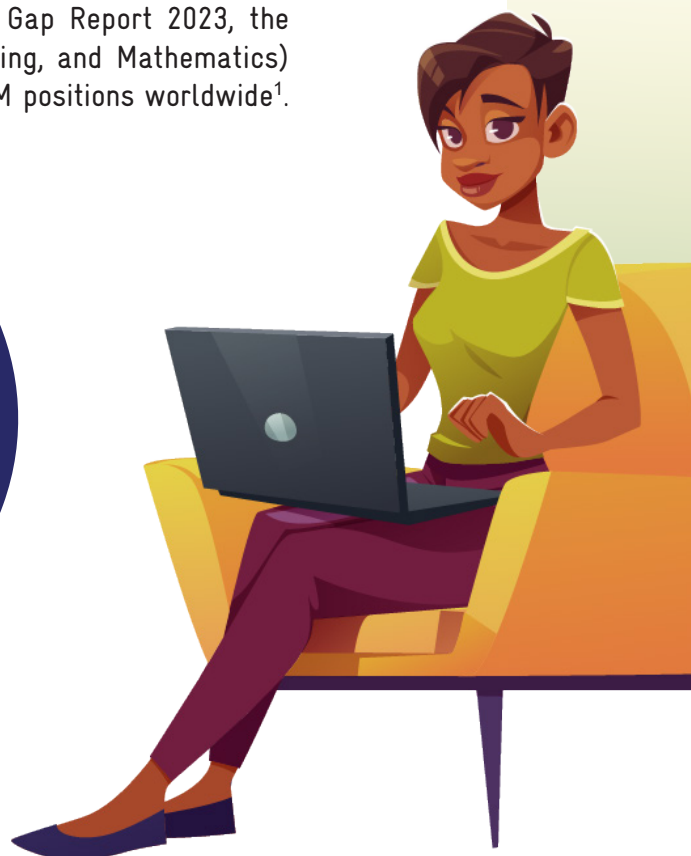
Digital innovation is widely recognized as a catalyst for economic development, job creation, and societal transformation. Despite this recognition, the benefits of innovation are not evenly distributed; women remain significantly underrepresented in the technology and innovation sectors globally, and Ghana is no exception. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, the global gender gap in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) remains substantial, with women holding only 29.2% of STEM positions worldwide¹.

**World Economic
Forum's Global Gender
Gap Report 2023**

29.2% •
STEM Positions held
by Women Globally



¹ World Economic Forum. (2023). Global Gender Gap Report 2023.



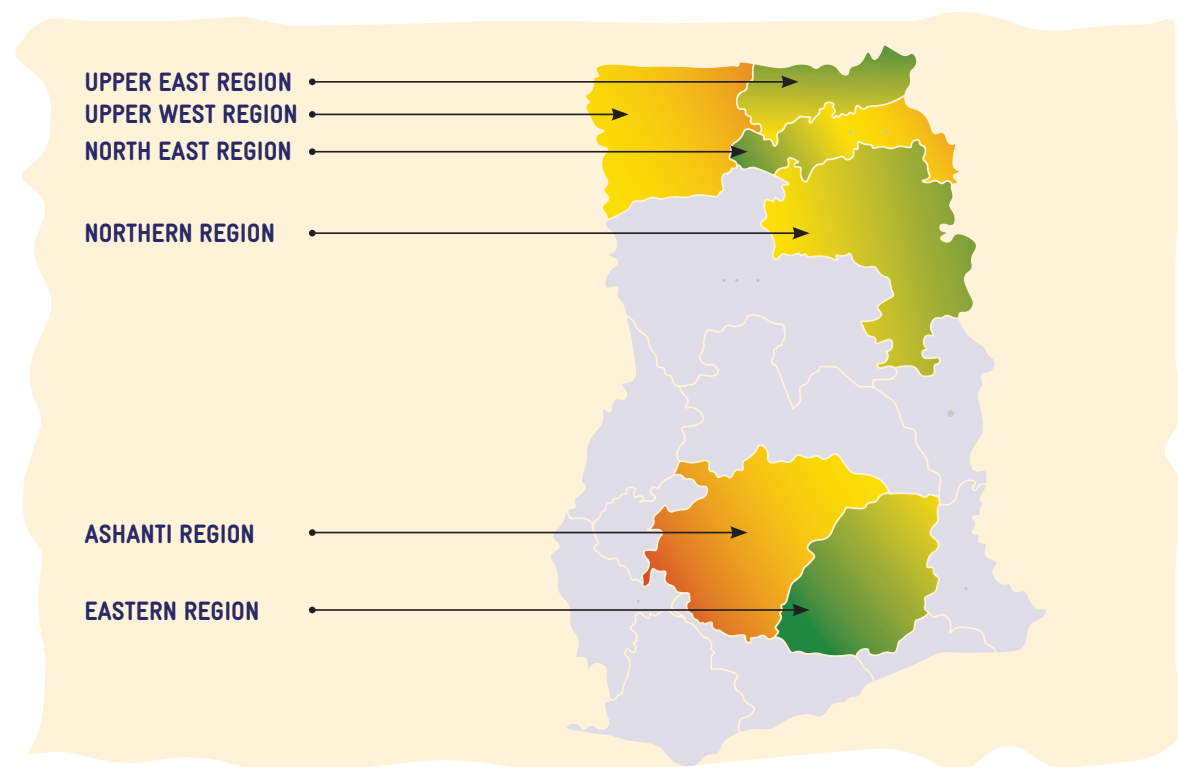
In Ghana, while women comprise approximately 51.2% of the total population, their participation in formal technology and innovation ecosystems remains comparatively low². A 2020 study by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) on Ghana's entrepreneurship landscape noted that women led enterprises tend to be underrepresented in sectors such as ICT. When present, they often face barriers such as limited access to finance, networks, mentorship, and tailored support³. These limitations serve as an immense barrier to achieving gender equality in the digital innovation ecosystem. Similarly, the needs assessments which informed the toolkit highlighted numerous problems faced by diverse groups of women and men, and the next section is a summary of the findings.

This toolkit aims to bridge that gender gap by providing a structured, context-specific approach to gender integration, tailored to the realities of Ghanaian digital hubs. While it considers the needs of both women and men, more content is devoted to women because evidence shows they face greater and more complex barriers, from limited access to finance and mentorship to online harassment and restrictive sociocultural norms. Addressing these gaps is essential to achieving equity, ensuring women can participate on equal footing with men. At the same time, the toolkit offers strategies that also benefit men and other marginalized groups, ultimately supporting a more inclusive and resilient digital innovation ecosystem.

There is another toolkit entitled: Gender-Responsive Toolkit for Workshop Organizers in Ghana, authored by GIZ. Refer to the toolkit for workshop organizers for a detailed discussion on the sociocultural and economic factors that serve as barriers to women's access to digital technology.



1.2 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT



² Ghana Statistical Service. (2021). 2021 Population and Housing Census.

³ International Finance Corporation (IFC). (2020). Ghana: Innovation for African Women Entrepreneurs Report.

A national needs assessment was carried out across six regions in Ghana, namely Upper West, Upper East, NorthEast, Northern, Ashanti and Eastern Regions, to understand the current state of gender integration within digital innovation hubs. Key findings of the assessment include:

1

LEADERSHIP IMBALANCE:

While **87% of hubs (17 hubs)** reported actively promoting women in leadership, only 35% reported that women occupy **26–50%** of leadership roles, and **29%** had women in just **1–25%** of such positions. The findings highlight a significant gap between the intention of increasing women's active role in leadership and its implementation.

2

FORMAL GENDER POLICIES:

Over **70% of hubs** reported having a formal gender policy, while **23%** do not. The presence of policies is a positive sign, but practical implementation and institutional commitment remain inconsistent. It is also important to highlight that the percentage could be an overestimate due to anticipations about the assessors' expectations of the hubs to have gender policies.

3

WORKPLACE POLICIES AND CULTURE:

Some hubs reported commendable practices such as maternity leave, flexible work schedules, and gender-sensitive office spaces. However, others lacked deeper integration strategies, such as gender-responsive budgeting and structured mentorship programs, which are central to enhancing gender representation.

4

HIRING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

Some of the hubs integrate gender in hiring, but over a third still lack clear strategies. Best practices included inclusive job descriptions, balanced recruitment panels, and gender quotas in some cases.

5

DATA AND MONITORING:

Majority of hubs collect gender-disaggregated data. However, there was no productive use of the data across most hubs aside from reporting it to the funding agency. Yet, in a few hubs, the data was used to track progress. Therefore, more efforts can be made to translate this data into actionable insights and strategic plans that will promote gender equality outcomes.

6

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY:

Many hubs are still in the early stages of development, with limited staff and resources. This presents both challenges and opportunities. Small, agile teams can more easily embed gender responsiveness if guided appropriately.

Overall, the findings reveal a landscape where gender equality is widely recognized as important but ineffectively integrated into everyday practices.



1.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER INTEGRATION IN DIGITAL INNOVATION ORGANIZATIONS

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital innovation, diversity is not merely a matter of representation—it is a critical driver of creativity, resilience, and sustainable development. Gender integration within digital innovation organizations is essential for fostering inclusive ecosystems that unlock the full potential of diverse talents and perspectives. Innovation hubs, particularly in Ghana and across sub-Saharan Africa, play a pivotal role in shaping the digital economy and must therefore take deliberate steps to embed gender equity into their structures, policies, and practices.

However, systemic barriers continue to limit equal participation in the digital sphere. Women, in particular, often face unequal access to digital tools, education, funding, and leadership opportunities within innovation environments.

Without deliberate efforts to address these disparities, digital innovation risks perpetuating, or even deepening, existing inequalities. A lack of gender integration not only undermines fairness but also compromises the quality and relevance of digital products and services.

By contrast, genderresponsive innovation hubs create environments where all individuals feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute fully. Such organizations actively promote equity—embedding inclusive practices in governance, staffing, program design, and stakeholder engagement. They foster cultures of belonging that enable everyone to explore their full potential, irrespective of gender identity or expression.

This toolkit recognizes the critical role that digital innovation hubs play in shaping inclusive digital futures. It offers actionable strategies to support hubs in becoming gender-responsive equipping them to build inclusive, equitable, and dynamic ecosystems. In doing so, hubs not only strengthen their innovation capacity but also contribute meaningfully to broader goals of social justice and sustainable development.





1.4 TOOLKIT STRUCTURE AND HOW TO USE IT



Institutional Readiness

covers the internal policies, leadership practices, and organizational culture needed to support gender equality.



Program Design and Delivery

explores how to create programs and services that attract and benefit women and marginalized communities.



Community Engagement and Partnerships

provides strategies for building gender-inclusive ecosystems through collaboration.



Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

offers methods for tracking progress and embedding continuous improvement.



Practical Tools and Templates

include checklists, templates, and ready to use resources.



Case Studies and Resources

highlight real world examples and further readings.

Each section provides evidence based guidance, illustrative examples, and adaptable tools to support the hubs in their practice. Hubs are encouraged to treat the toolkit as a living resource – using it to self-assess, plan, act, and iterate towards greater gender inclusivity.

By committing to gender-responsiveness, digital innovation hubs will not only broaden the reach and impact of their innovations but also play a crucial role in shaping a more equitable digital economy in Ghana and beyond.



2

Understanding Gender – Responsiveness



Understanding Gender-Responsiveness

➔ 2.1 DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS: GENDER EQUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Addressing gender issues in digital technology means recognizing how digital technology impacts various women and men differently. This is crucial for tackling the digital divide and ensuring inclusive participation and safety for all, as the needs, interests, and aspirations of different social groups, for example, women and men, vary due to the societal roles assigned to them. Despite unprecedented advances in digital technologies, women and marginalized groups such as persons living with disabilities (PWDs) in Ghana face distinct barriers that hinder their full participation in and benefits from the digital sector. The digital innovation ecosystem is a highly male-dominated space where women's unique needs are rarely met. This neglect of women's specific requirements has resulted in serious consequences, including workspaces that are not accommodating for women, a lack of childcare options, and limited flexibility in scheduling training and hubs programs, forcing women to choose between their domestic responsibilities and attending these programs. Moreover, widespread sexism, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping based on gender, primarily directed towards women and girls, along with sexual harassment in training and workshop environments, cause significant discomfort for women. Another challenge is the absence of a critical mass of women and other minority groups, such as PDWs, as trainers and mentors to inspire and guide younger women in the digital technology ecosystem.

Additionally, women face cyberbullying and fraud due to limited awareness of safety mechanisms while using digital technology. Related to this, women's knowledge of and use of digital technology remains rudimentary, lagging that of men. However, leveraging digital platforms, tools, and digital financial services is essential, as they offer unique opportunities for women's economic empowerment, enhancing their agency within the family and community, as well as their political participation at various levels. Digital transformation can help achieve gender equality if digital inclusion is prioritized.

GROUP EXERCISE ONE:

IDENTIFYING GENDER ISSUES IN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSFORMATION FOR STAFF

DURATION: 30 Minutes

Divide the group into reasonable sizes, preferably four or five. Ask the groups to identify the unique challenges faced by different groups of women and men who have benefited from training focusing on digital technology from their organization. For instance, what are the different challenges that various women and men face? (That is, young, middleaged, old, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, religious groups, etc.).

Facilitate a discussion of sample answers, encouraging participants to share their perspectives and experiences.

Conclude by stating that all the answers are interesting, but no particular answer is superior to another. Be sure to clarify any misunderstandings, such as views that homogenize the challenges among the diverse groups.

Note that it is important to apply the principle of no 'right or wrong answers' in adult learning. In the next chapter, relevant terminologies are explained, and this exercise can be used as a way of preparation to discuss key issues such as intersectionality, gender, etc.



2.1.1 Defining Sex

Sex can be defined as the biological characteristics associated with being male or female. These characteristics are evident at birth. These characteristics are usually observable at birth and may include **Chromosomes** (e.g., XY for males, XX for females), **Internal reproductive organs** (e.g., ovaries, testes, uterus), **Genitalia** (e.g., penis, vulva), and **Hormonal profiles** (e.g., testosterone, estrogen levels).

NOTE: This is a simplified definition. It reflects a binary framework (male/female) that does not account for the full spectrum of human biological diversity. For example, intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female, reminding us that sex is not strictly binary.



2.1.2 Defining Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics associated with women, men, girls, boys, and other gender identities. It encompasses the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that society assigns to these genders, and these expectations can change over

time and across cultures. Socially constructed means that gender roles, expectations, and comportment are not biologically determined but are learned and reinforced through culture, socialization, and institutions. The concept of gender shapes what is expected, permitted, and valued in men and women, as well as in girls and boys, within a community.

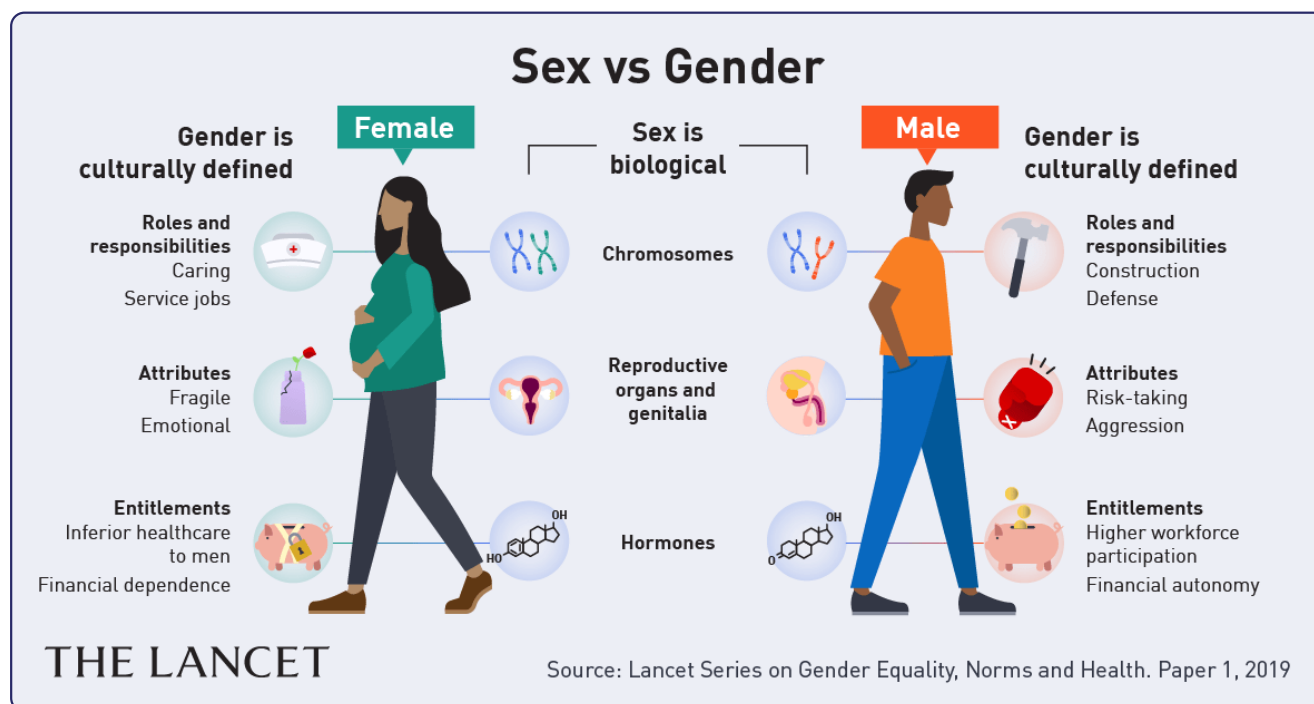


Figure 1: Sex Vs Gender



2.1.3 Gender Norms and Gender Relations

Gender norms refer to the accepted attributes, standards, and expectations that generally conform to a person's gender identity. Gender identity refers to an individual's sense of their own gender. Gender identity is an individual's deeply held sense of their own gender, which may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender norms shape how women, men, girls, and boys are expected to behave in a given society. These norms are internalized early in life and contribute to ongoing cycles of gender socialization and stereotyping.



EXAMPLE:

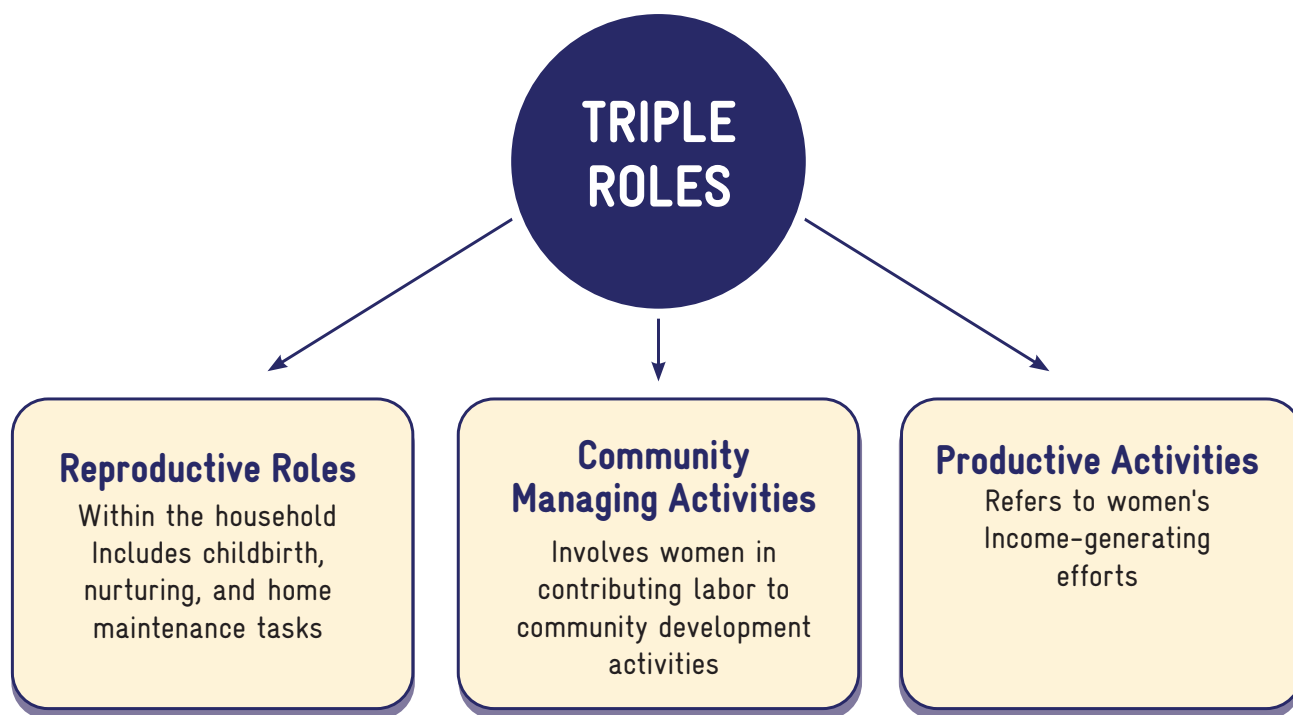
For instance, the association of women with domestic tasks and men with productive or income generating work contributes to a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women and girls. This division – linking women to the private and domestic sphere and men to the public and productive sphere – has significant effects on their participation in the digital economy. One result is that certain entrepreneurial activities, such as those involving digital technology and technological innovation, are often situated in male-dominated spaces, and many hubs are rarely friendly to women. These divisions are not based on science or ability, but rather on entrenched gender norms that frame some tasks as inappropriate or "taboo" for women, and others as offlimits to men. As a result, individuals who fail to conform to these roles often face social sanctions or exclusion.

Gender relations refer to the social relationships between individuals of different genders, such as men and women. They highlight the interactions and power dynamics that exist between genders in society. These relations encompass cooperation, connection, and mutual support, as well as conflict, separation, and competition, alongside differences and inequality. Gender relations are characterized by pervasive power asymmetries, for example, where different categories of women are perceived to be subordinated to various groups of men in terms of access to power and productive resources, such as digital tools and spaces.

Gender Roles are the socially constructed behaviours, activities, and attributes that society deems suitable for specific genders, for example, men and women. They are the different tasks that society expects women or men to perform. They are learned from birth and reinforced by parents, teachers, peers, and society during socialization. Gender roles determine attitudes, behaviors, and access to resources. They define how power is distributed between genders, for example, women and men within the household. They vary across cultures, can change over time, and spill over into formal and informal economic sectors. Research shows that in many low-income societies, such as those where we work, women are disproportionately burdened, giving rise to the concepts of triple roles and multiple burdens. The triple roles concept is used to describe the assignment of three types of roles to women, namely reproductive roles within the household, which include childbirth, nurturing, and home maintenance tasks; community managing activities, which involve women mobilizing and contributing labor to community development activities; and productive activities, which refer to women's income generating efforts. The demands on women's time for the first two have implications for income generating tasks. They also lead to time poverty and health issues. For instance, women who are burdened with reproductive and community managing tasks experience time constraints in embarking on productive activities, leading to time poverty.

**EXAMPLE:**

How are gender roles distributed in digital hubs, entrepreneurship, and innovation? Consider the concentration of women in lower-level positions in the hubs, such as secretarial and cleaning jobs. At the same time, men often occupy roles like CEO, managers and financial officers in digital technology hubs. The following is a simple diagram illustrating the Triple Roles Framework.



TRIPLE ROLES OF WOMEN

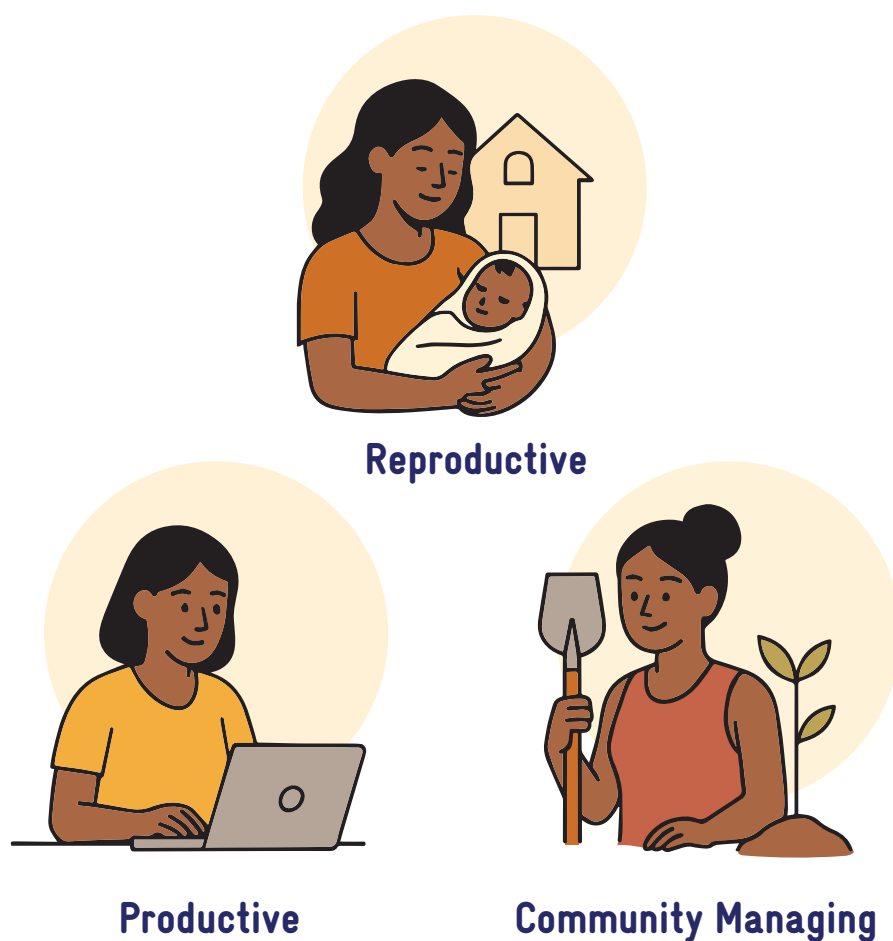


Figure 2: Triple Roles of Women



2.2 GROUP EXERCISE TWO:

WHY GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS MATTERS IN INNOVATION

TABLE 1: WHY GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS MATTERS IN INNOVATION

Why do you target mainly women for digital skills trainings?	Because women face greater barriers to accessing digital tools and skills due to gender norms, lower access to digital technological devices, and limited time. Targeting them helps close this digital divide
Isn't focusing on women unfair to men?	Gender-transformative work includes everyone. However, women have historically had fewer opportunities, so targeted support helps create a level playing field. Supporting women will also enhance social inclusion.



What do we stand to gain by bridging the gender gap?

Prioritizing gender-responsiveness is not just a matter of fairness; it is a strategic imperative for innovation success. Diverse teams involving different groups of women and men in different roles have been shown to outperform homogeneous teams in problem-solving, creativity, and financial performance⁴. McKinsey's "Diversity Wins" report (2020) highlights that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the bottom quartile⁵.

In the context of digital innovation, yawning gender gaps mean that products and services fail to meet the needs of women and marginalized groups effectively, as the potential user base. For instance, a study by UNESCO showed that 90% of digital content is created only in a few languages, often overlooking the diverse communication needs of women and marginalized groups⁶. Hubs that are gender-responsive have the potential to cultivate innovations that are more universally relevant, equitable, and impactful, addressing contextual issues.

Furthermore, advancing gender responsiveness in entrepreneurship and innovation aligns with global and national development goals. Ghana's Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (2017–2024) emphasized the need for inclusive growth and recognized gender equality as a cross-cutting issue critical for sustainable development⁷. Similarly, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 specifically calls for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including ensuring women's full and effective participation at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life⁸.

⁴ Harvard Business Review. (2016). Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter.

⁵ McKinsey & Company. (2020). Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters.

⁶ UNESCO. (2019). I'd Blush If I Could: Closing Gender Divides in Digital Skills Through Education.

⁷ Government of Ghana. (2017). Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (2017–2024).

⁸ United Nations. (2015). Sustainable Development Goals.

Benefits of Gender-Responsive Digital Innovation Hub

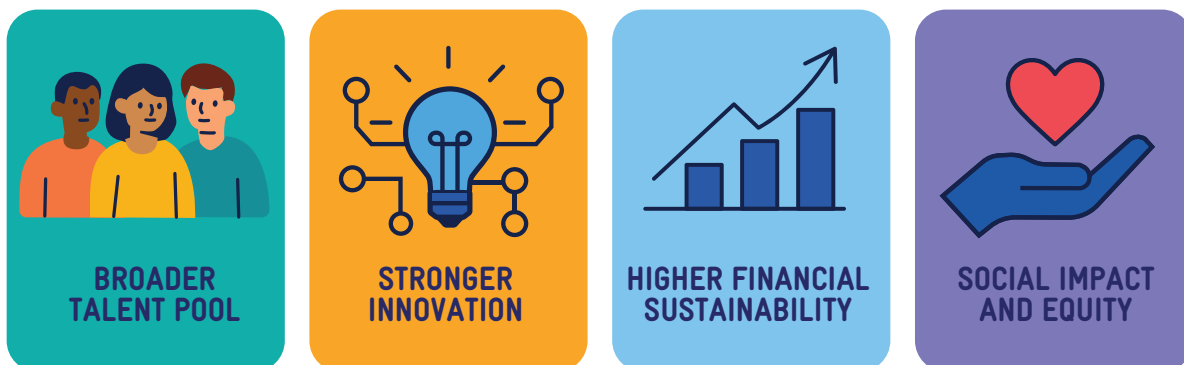


Figure 3: Benefits of Gender-Responsive DIHs



2.2.1 GROUP EXERCISE THREE: UNDERSTANDING GENDER

DURATION: 30 Minutes

Instructions:

Divide the participants into small groups of three or four and ask them to explore responses to the questions:

What is gender? What is sex? What are the power dynamics involved in gender relations? How do they affect access to digital technology resources?

Role of the facilitator:

- » Help the small groups generate ideas about gender and sex.
- » The aim is to develop a better understanding of the term and to explore the power dynamics and relations that negatively affect women's access to productive resources.
- » Invite groups to share their ideas.
- » Clarify any misunderstandings and close the session.



2.2 GENDER EQUITY

Gender equity is the process of ensuring fairness between genders, like women and men, in the distribution of resources, privileges, opportunities, and benefits. It involves recognizing inequality and requires measures to work towards equality. Gender equity is based on the understanding that historical factors (i.e., women joining the labor market much later) as well as cultural beliefs, norms, and values (i.e., those that limit women to domestic duties and lower-level, less remunerated jobs), and political processes in the past have disadvantaged many women and girls in various contexts. Therefore, to ensure that women can benefit from opportunities and resources on equal terms with men, measures must be implemented to rectify historical disadvantages in entrepreneurship and digital technology. Critics of equity measures have described them as 'reversed discrimination'; that is, by implementing measures to address historical and structural disadvantages, equity measures are perceived as installing discrimination precisely where they seek to dismantle it. However, this reflects a misunderstanding of the combined effects of systemic and cultural barriers that render women's participation in digital technology and entrepreneurship challenging. Without equity measures, the gender gaps in digital innovation are unlikely to close. It is important to note that supporting women and girls to acquire greater awareness through gender equity activities is not meant to disadvantage boys and men. Equity is about taking steps to address disadvantages by redistributing power and resources in a fair manner. The goal of gender equity is to close the inequality gap and create a more just society. Gender equity is an important step towards achieving gender equality.



EXAMPLE:

The Affirmative Action Act 2024 (Gender Equity) is an example of equity measures. This is because it aims to address historical and systemic disparities by ensuring that different groups of women have equal opportunities in political representation, employment and education, going beyond simply treating everyone the same. The equity measures are outlined in the First Schedule in the progressive targets for reaching gender equality by 2034.



2.3 GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality can be understood as the situation where all genders enjoy the same political, social, economic, and cultural status. Gender equality means that the interests, needs, and priorities of all genders, including women, men, girls, and boys, are taken into account in all areas. This ensures that women, men, girls, and boys receive equal treatment and opportunities to reach their full potential, as well as their human rights and dignity. Gender equality is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender, has equal chances to succeed. Equality does not imply that women and men will become the same. Instead, it means that the rights and opportunities of women and men are not determined by their being born men or women. Gender equality is a basic human right recognized in numerous international human rights documents. It represents equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for everyone, irrespective of sex or gender. This entails preventing discrimination based on sex or gender and ensuring all individuals have equal access to resources and opportunities.

In summary, gender equality means that all individuals, regardless of gender and other intersec-tional factors, have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It indicates that access to education, employment, leadership, and resources is the same for everyone. The emphasis is on equal treatment, such as providing the same digital skills training for both women and men and not discriminating based on gender. For its part, gender equity recognises that different genders can face diverse barriers and starting points due to historical and social disadvantages. Equity involves fair treatment by offering tailored support or accommodations to tackle these disparities and achieve genuine equality in outcomes. For example, providing extra digital literacy resources or childcare services for women who may have had less access to education or technology in the past. Equity typically entails redistributing resources or opportunities to rectify existing disparities, while equality might not directly confront these imbalances. Figure 4 below is Tony Ruth’s “The Giving Tree”, a visual representation of the differences between inequality, equality, equity, and justice.

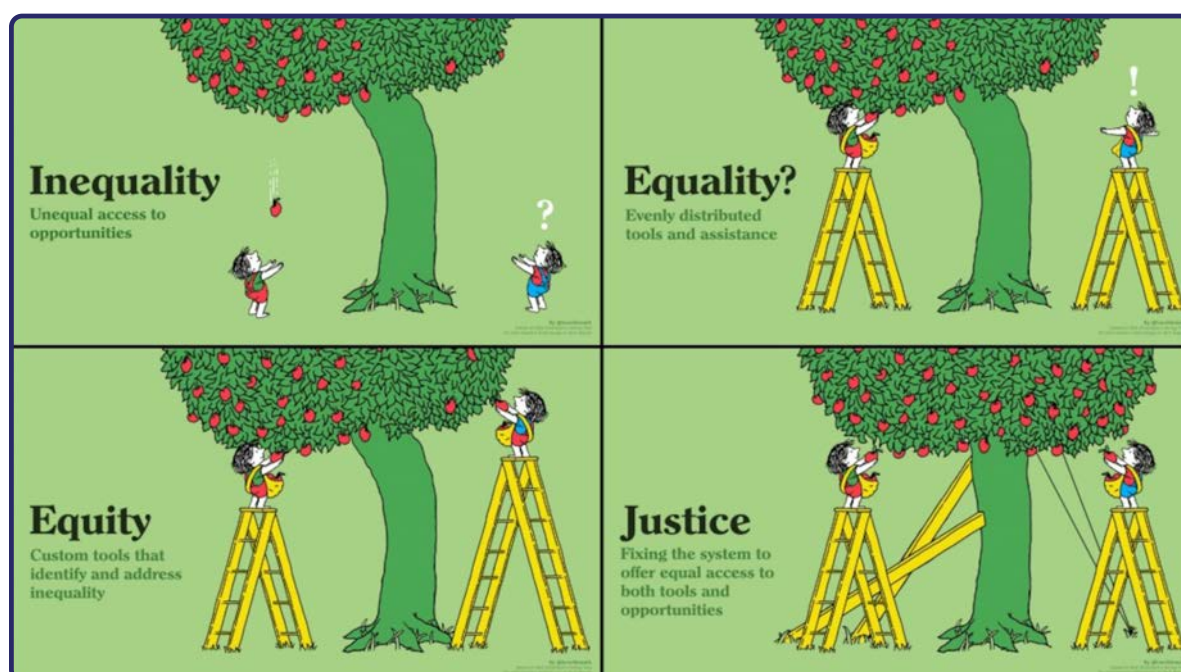


Figure 4: Equity vs Equality depiction

Case Study

A digital innovation hub indicated that, when resources allow, they endeavor to engage women entrepreneurs one week in advance for training sessions. They offer preliminary training to facilitate an understanding of fundamental concepts prior to the commencement of the main sessions. This considerate strategy recognizes the challenges encountered by women, thereby often necessitating additional support in digital training. Providing such support constitutes a significant step toward promoting fairness.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY means that everyone has the same starting point and access to the same resources, opportunities, or conditions, regardless of their background. It emphasizes fairness in the process people succeed based on merit, effort, or talent. Equality of opportunity is about ensuring a fair starting point. The principle of fairness suggests that everyone should have the same access to resources and opportunities, such as education, jobs, and housing, without discrimination. It focuses on creating a level playing field where individuals can compete based on their abilities and efforts. The belief is that if the process is fair, then the outcomes will also be fair.

EQUALITY OF OUTCOME means ensuring that everyone achieves the same or similar results, regardless of their starting point. It emphasises fairness in results by adjusting resources or support to achieve equal outcomes across individuals or groups. Equality of outcome focuses on a fair finishing point. This principle seeks to ensure that everyone achieves similar levels of success, irrespective of their background or circumstances. It may involve providing additional support or resources to those who are disadvantaged to help them attain the same outcomes as others. Equality of outcome is sometimes viewed as a more radical approach, as it may necessitate interventions that go beyond merely offering equal opportunities.



2.4 WHAT IS DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?

Digital transformation involves integrating digital technology throughout an organization, fundamentally altering how businesses operate and deliver value to their customers. It represents a cultural shift that requires businesses and other organizations to continuously question existing practices, embrace experimentation and innovation and to adapt to changing technological and social landscapes. Digital transformation not only reshapes internal processes but also affects broader societal roles and creates new economic opportunities, especially in emerging sectors and underserved communities.



2.5 GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS IN DIGITAL INNOVATION HUBS

Gender-responsiveness in Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) refers to the intentional design of policies, programs, and cultures that consider the unique experiences and barriers faced by different genders, aiming to dismantle these barriers. In practice, a gender-responsive digital innovation hub should be:

- » Designing programs that are accessible to women and address intersectional issues, including flexible training schedules, women-only sessions, and content tailored to their needs and experiences.
- » Training facilitators to use gender-sensitive language and examples that reflect diverse lived realities.
- » Providing safe, welcoming physical spaces, such as separate restrooms, nursing areas for mothers, and accessible facilities to PWDs.
- » Recruiting competent women mentors, trainers, and role models to inspire and guide other women in tech and entrepreneurship.

- » Ensuring digital tools and opportunities are available to those with limited access, especially in underserved communities.
- » Collecting gender-disaggregated data to understand participation, track progress, and improve inclusivity.

Simply put, it is a hub that does not assume one-size-fits-all, but intentionally builds structures and support systems that work for everyone, especially women who are often left behind in the digital economy.



2.6 WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

People's vulnerability to risk is shaped by the interaction of various factors, such as social class, income, age, disability, and ethnicity. Intersectionality serves as a metaphor for understanding how different forms of inequality or disadvantage interact and create obstacles for marginalized individuals. It recognizes that the factors contributing to disadvantage or discrimination are interconnected rather than isolated; they overlap with gender inequality, intensifying the impacts and creating additional barriers to support. Vulnerability to risk is influenced by the interplay of these factors, including class, income, age, disability, and ethnicity. Similarly, the lived experiences of women in digital technology intersect with their identity markers, such as class, age, level of education, and social capital, to create intersecting challenges for them.

For example, consider the challenges faced by various women in the north and south of Ghana. Societies in northern Ghana are characterized by men dominated beliefs and patriarchal ideologies, resulting in more strictly regulated gender norms and roles. In southern Ghana, however, the gender roles and norms are less policed, allowing women greater ability to exercise agency. Furthermore, the situation of a nursing mother with two young children, along with the demands of motherhood on her time, may markedly differ from that of a woman without similar responsibilities. Moreover, consider that this woman is a single parent without family support, which impacts the time she has available for selfcare, participation in digital technology training, and career development. Therefore, it is crucial to consider intersectional factors when designing and implementing interventions. For instance, how can we ensure that workspaces are mother and child-friendly?

Intersectionality Feminist Frameworks: IFFs

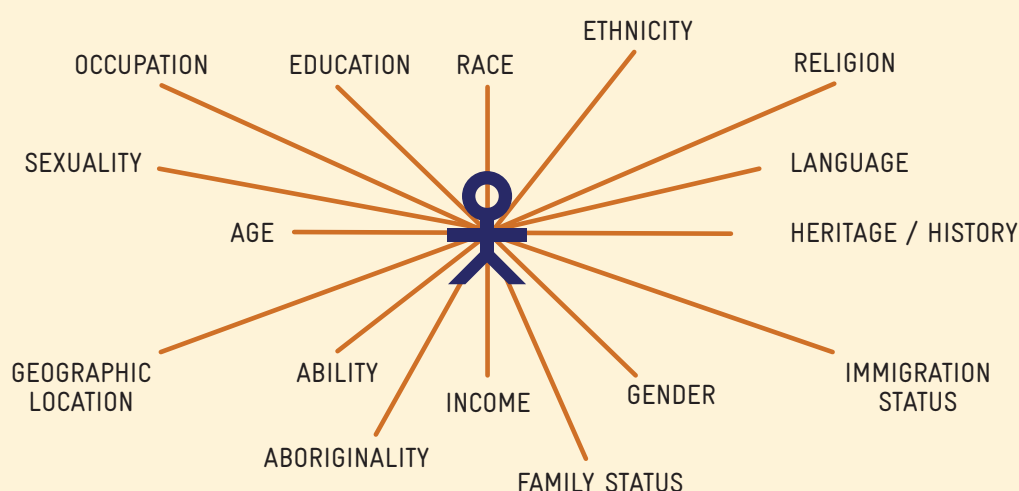


Figure 5: Intersectionality

Source: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women



2.7 WHAT IS SOCIAL INCLUSION?

Within the digital innovation ecosystem, social inclusion is the practice of ensuring that all individuals regardless of gender, disability, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or geographic location can access, participate in, and benefit from the opportunities provided by digital innovation spaces, such as tech hubs, co-working labs, innovation centres, or makerspaces. It means people at risk of marginalization are meaningfully involved, empowered, and heard within organizations and communities.



Case Study on Best Practices in inclusive program design and delivery

A digital innovation Hub, based in the Ashanti Region, which is committed to making technology accessible to all adopts social inclusion as a core operational principle, ensuring that marginalized groups, women from low-income backgrounds, men from ethnic minority groups, persons with disability, and women and men with low education can actively participate in and benefit from its programs.

The hub first conducted participatory assessments with women, persons with disabilities, rural youth, and older adults to understand the specific barriers they faced. Based on the findings, it provided the following:

- » **Customized Training Tracks:** to address their specific needs. This was by developing separate digital skills programs adapted for:
 - › Women with limited formal education
 - › Visually and hearing-impaired users
 - › Rural artisans transitioning to online markets
- » **Accessible Infrastructure:** The hub upgraded its physical spaces with ramps, assistive technology tools, and multilingual support, including sign language and braille.
- » **Local Partnerships:** Partnered with women's associations, disability advocacy groups, and rural community leaders to co-deliver training and ensure that the content is culturally appropriate.
- » **Mentorship and Peer Support:** The hub introduced mentorship pairings across different social groups (e.g., urban rural, abled disabled) to promote learning and understanding inclusion.

IMPACT OF THE INTERVENTIONS:

- » 50% of program graduates in 2024 (6 months after the interventions) were women and girls.
- » Persons with disabilities accounted for 18% of incubated startups.
- » The hub saw a 40% increase in participation from rural districts.
- » Participant satisfaction surveys showed a 90% rating in "feeling welcomed and valued."

WHY IT WORKS:

- » The interventions were grounded in community voices and identified needs
- » They addressed both digital and social barriers that make access to digital technology difficult for marginalized groups
- » They combined infrastructure upgrades with cultural transformation to ease access and nurture inclusivity.

LESSONS FROM THE HUB'S APPROACH:

Inclusion goes beyond just providing physical access; it is about fostering genuine engagement, collaboration, and empowering everyone. By embracing these values, the hub has become a shining example of inclusive digital innovation in Ghana.



2.8 CONTEXTUALIZING GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS IN GHANA



2.8.1 Current Gender Landscape

Ghana has made commendable progress towards gender equality across all sectors. However, notable gaps still exist, especially in the fields of science, technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Ghana ranked 105th out of 146 countries overall, with significant disparities in economic participation and education attainment⁹.

Specific to the innovation Sector:

- » Women make up approximately **26%** of the STEM workforce in Ghana¹⁰.
- » Only about **15%** of tech startups in Ghana have a woman in a leadership role¹¹.
- » Women entrepreneurs often operate smaller businesses and have more limited access to formal financing and mentorship networks compared to their male counterparts¹².

Furthermore, socio-cultural norms continue to influence perceptions of women's roles in society. A 2022 Afrobarometer survey revealed that 45% of Ghanaians still believe that men should have priority when jobs are scarce¹³. This situation is linked to the notion of men as the primary family providers in Ghanaian societies and the cultural expectation that women should be supported by their partners or male family members. These underlying male dominated norms can discourage women from pursuing careers in technology and innovation fields, reinforcing barriers within institutional structures.



2.8.2 Policy and Institutional Environment

Recognizing these challenges, the Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act 1121, 2024 was passed. The Act provides the legal basis for integrating gender across both the private and public sectors. Similarly, Ghana's National Gender Policy (2015), currently under review, emphasises women's economic empowerment and calls for the promotion of gender equality in science, technology, and innovation sectors¹⁴. Moreover, Ghana's Digital Economy Policy (2020–2030) underlines the need to bridge the digital gender divide, creating opportunities for women's inclusion in the digital economy¹⁵.

Digital Innovation Hubs, as key actors in the entrepreneurial and technological ecosystem, have a unique role to play in actualizing these policy aspirations by adopting gender-responsive practices.

9 World Economic Forum. (2023). Global Gender Gap Report 2023.

10 UNESCO. (2021). STEM and Gender Advancement (SAGA) Project: Ghana Country Report.

11 Ghana Tech Lab. (2021). Ghana Startup Ecosystem Report.

12 International Finance Corporation (IFC). (2020). Women Entrepreneurs and Financial Inclusion in Ghana.

13 Afrobarometer. (2022). Round 9 Survey: Ghana Country Results.

14 Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ghana. (2015). National Gender Policy.

15 Ministry of Communications, Ghana. (2020). Digital Economy Policy (2020–2030).



2.9 GENDER AND THE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



2.9.1 Barriers to Gender-Inclusive Innovation

Women and gender-diverse individuals encounter a range of barriers that prevent full participation in innovation ecosystems:

- » **Access to Finance:** Globally, women entrepreneurs receive less than 3% of venture capital funding¹⁶. Although local initiatives exist, Ghanaian women entrepreneurs often struggle to secure funding beyond microfinance schemes.
- » **Skills Gaps:** The digital skills gap persists, with men more likely than women to access advanced ICT training opportunities.
- » **Networking and Mentorship:** Women often have less access to professional networks and mentorship – critical components for business and career advancement.
- » **Stereotypes and Bias:** Unconscious bias in hiring, investment decisions, and leadership selection can sideline women and gender-diverse individuals.
- » **Work-Life Balance:** Lack of family-friendly policies or services like on-site childcare disproportionately affects women entrepreneurs and tech professionals.



2.9.2 Opportunities for Transformative Change

- » **Growing Young Women Talent:** Initiatives such as the African Girls Can Code Program and local coding bootcamps in Ghana (e.g., Soronko Academy) are nurturing a new generation of women tech innovators.
- » **Policy Alignment:** National and international frameworks are increasingly pushing for inclusive digital economies, creating a supportive environment for gender-responsive interventions.
- » **Market Potential:** Research shows that women control about 70–80% of consumer purchasing decisions, making their insights vital for designing relevant and successful digital products and services¹⁷.
- » **Innovation Advantage:** Studies have consistently found that diverse teams innovate faster and produce better outcomes¹⁸.

Digital innovation hubs that actively engage with these opportunities can promote gender equality and also boost their own relevance, resilience, and competitiveness.



Integrating Gender Equality

Integrating gender equality into organisational structures and practices of the hubs is important for achieving gender equality. InterAction's Gender Equity Amendments, incorporated into their PVO (Private Voluntary Organisations). Standards outline the following steps:

¹⁶ Boston Consulting Group. (2018). Why Women-Owned Startups Are a Better Bet.

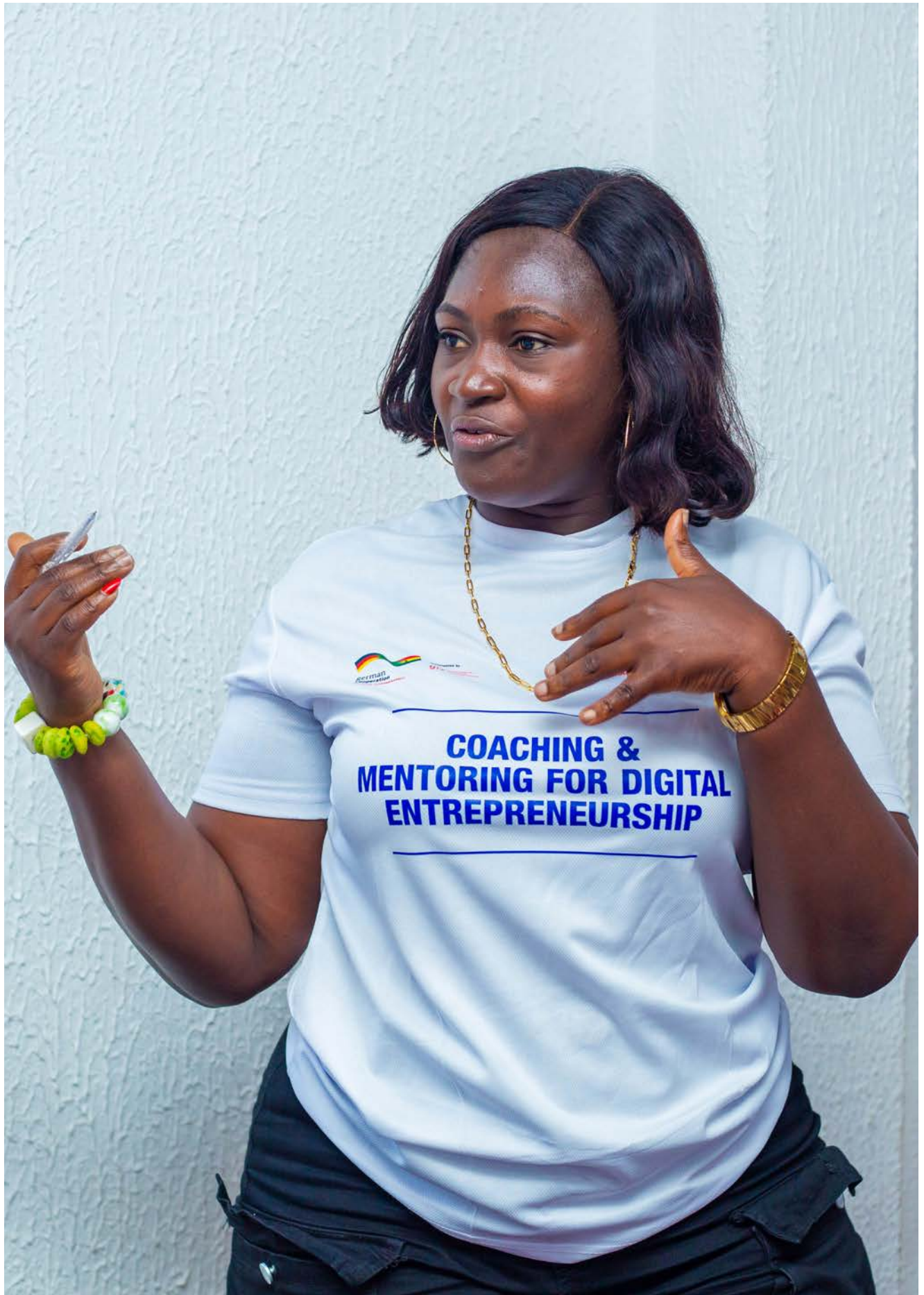
¹⁷ Harvard Business Review. (2009). The Female Economy.

¹⁸ Cloverpop. (2017). Hacking Diversity with Inclusive Decision-Making.

InterAction Gender Equity Amendments PVO Standards

- » Create a written policy that explicitly commits to gender equality in organizational structures, staff, and board composition.
- » Train the staff of the hubs on gender analysis to enhance planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- » Integrate gender analysis and planning into all phases of the program process, in collaboration with local NGO partners with expertise in gender equality and social inclusion.
- » Integrate gender sensitivity into human resource development for staff at all levels to enhance organizational effectiveness, foster nondiscriminatory relationships, and promote respect for diversity in work and management styles.
- » Include gender awareness as a criterion for job performance.
- » Aim to increase the number of women in senior decision-making roles and on Boards of Directors.
- » Implement family-friendly policies and foster an environment that allows both women and men to balance work and family life.
- » Create policies and practices that promote equal pay for equal work in the hubs.
- » Establish a mechanism aligned with the organization's mission and constituency, which has a mandate from the CEO to promote and oversee the integration of gender equality in programs and interventions.

Source: Adapted from the Gender Audit Handbook: A Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment and Transformation





3

Institutional Readiness: Embedding Gender- Responsiveness in Organizational Structures



Institutional Readiness: Embedding Gender Responsiveness in Organizational Structures

→ 3.1 ASSESSING YOUR HUB'S GENDER SENSITIVITY

Achieving gender responsiveness within a digital innovation hub begins with a critical self-assessment of the organization, highlighting the extent to which gender issues are incorporated. Many actors in the innovation hubs believe that by paying equal attention to women and men, adopting a neutral approach, they avoid discriminatory practices. However, deep-seated unconscious biases, structural inequalities, and unintended exclusions often persist despite all the well-intentioned measures, making it challenging for women and marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, to benefit equitably from digital technology. The absence of formal policies and practical interventions to address the unique needs of entrepreneurs further exacerbates these challenges in the digital innovation hubs. Undertaking a gender audit is a crucial initial step in understanding the issues and gaps in the operations of the hubs.

✓ What is gender audit?

A gender audit is also referred to as a gender self-assessment. A gender audit involves systematically examining policies, leadership structures, staffing, culture, and operations through a gender lens. It is a tool that is used to assess how gender issues are integrated into a hub's policies, programs, and practices. It works as a diagnostic process that can help identify the organization's strengths and weaknesses in terms of enhancing gender equality. According to UN Women's Gender Audit Handbook, such audits assist organizations in identifying gaps and opportunities for mainstreaming gender in such areas as organizational structures, policies, staff perceptions, and the impact of the organization's activities on different genders¹⁹.

¹⁹ UN Women. (2019). Gender Audit Handbook: A Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment and Transformation.



Key areas for assessment include:

- » Gender balance in leadership and staffing.
- » Existence (or lack) of gender-sensitive policies.
- » Representation of women, persons with disability and marginalized groups in decision-making roles.
- » Workplace culture regarding inclusion, harassment, and support²⁰.
- » Budget allocations for gender-related activities.

The Audit provides organizations with three useful outputs:

- » A reflection of the status of gender equality within the organization.
- » A baseline for collective discussion and analysis.
- » A participatory process that promotes organizational ownership of the agency's gender equality initiatives and ongoing gender action planning.

A simple initial diagnostic tool can be a Gender Scorecard, rating each area from "Not Started" to "Fully Integrated."

GENDER AUDIT STORY: BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GENDER GAP TECH HUB IN GHANA BACKGROUND

A Tech Hub in northern Ghana was established to foster digital innovation and entrepreneurship among young people. Featuring modern infrastructure, shared workspaces, and tech mentorship programs, the hub quickly evolved into a lively centre for startups. A year into operations, the leadership noticed that over 80% of their active users were young men. Despite being open to all, women, persons with disabilities, and older individuals were largely absent. The management and their donor partners were concerned that the supposed gender-neutral operations were limiting. This realisation prompted the management team to commission a gender audit to identify unseen barriers and develop inclusion strategies.

Audit Process

With support from a gender expert, the hub undertook a 4-week audit using:

- » Staff interviews
- » Focus group discussions with users and non-users (including women, rural youth, and persons with disabilities)
- » Facility walk-throughs
- » Review of documents and policies

20 The Gender Audit Handbook A Tool for Organizational Self Assessment and Transformation



Findings of the Gender Audit were as Follows:

1. Policy and Leadership Gaps

- » There was no gender policy or strategy in place to enable the hub to address gender issues effectively.
- » The leadership team is entirely male, contributing to making women feel out of place.
- » Absence of gender-focused indicators in monitoring, which could help them track progress.

2. Participation Imbalances

- » Women reported feeling “unwelcome” or “intimidated” in male-dominated spaces.
- » Training sessions were scheduled at times conflicting with women’s domestic re-sponsibilities.
- » No data were collected on participation by gender and disability.

3. Infrastructure and Safety

- » No separate restrooms or child-friendly spaces were available.
- » There was a lack of disability-friendly infrastructure.
- » There was no mechanism to report harassment or discrimination.

4. Program Design

- » Training content was not tailored to the different needs of men, women, persons with disability and less educated people.
- » Low visibility of women facilitators or role models.
- » Marketing materials featured only male success stories.



Here is what changed because of the findings: The response

Armed with these findings, the hub launched a Gender Action Plan, which included the following:

- » Developing a Gender Inclusion Policy.
- » Recruiting a woman co-manager and training all staff on gender sensitivity.
- » Installing ramps and accessible toilets.
- » Offering flexible training hours and child-care support.
- » Partnering with local women’s groups to co-design programs.
- » Launching a “Women Who Innovate” mentorship series.

Results After six Months of intervention

- » Women’s participation rose from 18% to 45%.
- » Two women-led startups joined the incubator.
- » The local assembly recognized the hub for promoting inclusive innovation.

Lessons Learned

The experiences of the hub described above show that being open to everyone is not the same as being inclusive. Hubs need to take deliberate steps to listen, adapt, and redesign their inter-ventions to address the differentiated needs of the entrepreneurs they work with. The gender audit became a turning point—not only in policy but also in mindset. It showed that gender inclusion requires intentional action, ongoing reflection, and shared accountability.



Gender Audit Steps

Let us explore some straightforward steps involved in conducting a gender audit. This process helps the hubs to understand and enhance their approach to gender equality.

Step 1: Preparing for the Audit within the hub

This step involves evaluating your hub's readiness, securing management support, and developing a communication plan. The initial phase of the Gender Audit process is to assess whether you are prepared to conduct the audit. Once readiness is confirmed, several actions are necessary for preparation. First, it is essential to secure backing from senior leadership, who act as your supporters throughout the process. Next, inform the staff about the purpose of the gender audit, the steps involved, and its organisational benefits, including the timeline. Finally, develop a plan to communicate each stage of the audit to staff, emphasising the process's value and the improvements it aims to achieve.

Step 2: Understanding gender in the hub

The second step in the Gender Audit process is to survey staff using the Gender Audit questionnaire, which helps assess staff understanding, attitudes, perceptions, and reported behavior regarding gender equality. Responses provide a baseline of staff perceptions about gender equality within the hub's programs and processes. The survey explores staff beliefs about the hub's work in two key areas: 1) programming, related to field activities; and 2) operations, related to internal activities. See Appendix 1 for a sample gender audit questionnaire.

Step 3: Digging Deeper by Conducting in-depth focus group conversations and Analysis

Step three of the Gender Audit involves focus groups with selected staff to gather insights on gender equality, mainstreaming, and integration. These guided conversations, led by 1-2 facilitators and note takers, aim to deepen understanding of survey results and explore staff views on a "gender-equitable organisation. Each session lasts up to an hour, using guided questions to ensure all voices

are heard. Participants should come from various departments and positions. Before focus groups, your gender team must decide on the following issues:

- › A focus group often has between 6–12 participants for effective discussion.
- › Get an experienced facilitator
- › Get a note-taker
- › Decide to record or not.

Step 4: Moving Forward: Gender Action Planning

The final step of the Gender Audit process is creating a Gender Action Plan, which aims to be an ongoing effort that encourages effective gender integration within your organization. Using results from the survey and focus group discussions, you organize a 1- to 2-day session with gender team members and other key staff who should participate in the dialogue. This discussion should yield the key issues to be addressed and the directions of the action plan.



Turning Results into Action Steps

The first step in creating the Gender Action Plan is for gender team members or hub managers, with the support of a gender expert, to review the key documents that were prepared during each step of the Gender Audit process. These documents include:

- 1) The gender audit findings from the questionnaire (or other reports) and
- 2) The gender audit focus group discussion report

These documents will serve as the basis for identifying recommendations and activities your Gender Team believes will most effectively promote gender integration. After reviewing the results, hold a Gender Action Planning session with team members and staff to develop the plan, including action recommendations, a timeframe, responsible parties, and resources. This session allows collaboration to identify activities that will improve gender integration. Many activities will emerge during the review of session materials. Throughout the Gender Audit, encourage staff to share ideas for enhancing the action plan. The recommendations will develop as you systematically review the results.

See Appendix 2 for a Gender Action Plan Planning Meeting Agenda (sample) and Appendix 3 for a Gender Action Plan template based on the Assessment.

Once the Gender Action Plan is developed, it is then shared with the staff. For many staff members, this will be the first time they have heard about the Gender Audit since the survey results were presented. The format of the Action Plan should help them see that their voices and ideas have been incorporated into the action planning process. The Gender Action Plan can be presented to staff at regularly scheduled staff meetings to sustain the momentum in implementing it.



Summary: Follow-Up and Maintenance

The final step is to monitor the Gender Action Plan. Once the gender team has publicly presented the plan and it has been formally adopted, the entire Gender Audit process is complete. However, gender integration does not stop there. The recommendations and activities outlined in the plan must be implemented, evaluated, and regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness. To facilitate this, the hub's gender expert should establish a regular schedule for reviewing the gender plan. This could be quarterly or integrated into the gender team's routine reporting process. At the very least, hubs should review the gender plan twice yearly. It is also recommended that the gender action plan be included in internal updates, where staff responsible for specific activities are prompted to report progress, highlight completed tasks, or note any lack thereof. Furthermore, the gender team and hub management can incorporate new activities as identified by members.

Monitoring the Gender Action Plan demands time and effort, which means it could be overlooked due to other responsibilities. Therefore, at least one staff member, preferably the gender expert/focal person, should be tasked with monitoring and have this requirement included in their performance criteria to ensure ongoing oversight. Without accountability, it might be neglected.



3.2 PRACTICAL STEPS FOR CONDUCTING GENDER AUDITS AND SURVEYS

Periodic gender audits and participant surveys provide deeper insights into how gender dynamics evolve within a hub's operations and programs.

Gender Audits

A gender audit assesses:

- » Institutional policies and practices
- » Gender sensitivity of leadership and decision-making
- » Workplace environment (harassment policies, inclusivity measures)
- » Budget allocations for gender initiatives

Conducting an internal audit every 12–24 months is recommended²¹.

Audit Tip: Involve external gender experts for objectivity and credibility.



Participant Surveys

Tailored surveys can gather data on:

- » Experiences of inclusion or exclusion
- » Perceived barriers to participation
- » Feedback on support services (e.g., childcare, mentorship)

Surveys should be anonymous to encourage honesty, and findings should be transparently shared with stakeholders.

Survey Example: After a coding bootcamp, participants could be asked to rate whether the program content felt inclusive and whether support systems met their needs, disaggregated by gender identity.



What is a Gender Scorecard?

A Gender Scorecard is a helpful tool that allows us to assess and keep track of how we are making progress toward achieving gender equality and empowering women. It is a widely recognized assessment tool used to see how well gender considerations are integrated into policies, programs and activities. Conducting a gender scorecard can help hubs measure their performance on gender equality. The scorecard not only highlights areas where the hub is performing well but also identifies areas where there is room for improvement, guiding us in developing better strategies going forward.

²¹ UNDP. (2019). Guidance Note: Gender Equality and Institutional Transformation.



Exercise: Gender Score Card Template for Hubs

Instructions:

This scorecard should be used to measure the hub's gender performance across several key dimensions. For each area, rate the hub's current situation on a scale from **1 (Not Started)** to **5 (Fully Integrated and Exemplary)**. After scoring, the total score will help identify areas that need further improvement.

TABLE 2: GENDER SCORE CARD TEMPLATE FOR DIHS			
AREA OF ASSESSMENT	DESCRIPTION	SCORE (1-5)	REMARKS
Leadership Commitment	Does the hub's leadership demonstrate a visible and ongoing commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment?		
Gender Policy	Is there a formal, documented gender equality policy in place that guides the hub's operations?		
Gender-Responsive Recruitment	Are gender-responsive recruitment practices implemented, and are gender-inclusive job advertisements used?		
Gender Balance in Leadership	Is there a significant representation of women and marginalized genders in senior leadership positions?		
Gender-Sensitive Program Design	Are gender needs actively considered during the design of programs and services?		
Mentorship and Networking for Women	Are mentorship opportunities and networking spaces provided specifically for women and marginalized groups, including marginalized men?		
Safe and Inclusive Work Environment	Does the hub provide a safe and welcoming environment for women, persons with disability and members of marginalized ethnic groups?		
Support for Work-Life Balance	Does the hub offer flexible working arrangements, parental leave, and support for caregiving responsibilities?		
Gender-responsive Budgeting	Does the hub allocate specific resources for gender equality initiatives and programs?		
Data Collection and Analysis	Are gender-disaggregated data collected and used to inform decision-making, program and evaluation?		
Training on Gender Equality	Does the hub provide regular gender equality and sensitivity training for staff and leadership?		
Gender-Responsive Partnerships	Does the hub engage in partnerships with organizations that focus on women's empowerment, gender equality, and social inclusion?		
Community Engagement	Is the hub actively involved in community activities promoting gender equality, social inclusion, and women's empowerment?		
Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)	Are there systems in place for tracking the progress of gender-responsive initiatives? Are evaluations conducted regularly?		

TABLE 3: SCORE INTERPRETATION	
TOTAL SCORE	INTERPRETATION
60–75	Highly Gender-Responsive Hub: The hub is doing exceptionally well in integrating gender equality across all operations. The hub needs to continue to build on these strengths and refine the practices further.
45–59	Moderately Gender-Responsive Hub: The hub has made significant progress but still has areas to improve. Focus on policies and practices that are lagging.
30–44	Initial Steps Towards Gender Responsiveness: The hub is in the early stages of adopting gender equality practices. Immediate attention is needed to integrate gender-sensitive approaches throughout the hub's operations.
15–29	Minimal Gender Integration: Gender equality practices are lacking or poorly integrated. A comprehensive strategy for gender responsiveness must be developed and implemented.
0–14	No Action or Awareness of Gender Equality: The hub has not yet taken any significant steps toward gender equality. Immediate action is necessary to build awareness and implement basic practices in closing the gender gap.



Key differences between a Gender Action Plan and a Gender Scorecard

The main difference between a Gender Action Plan and a Gender Scorecard is that a Gender Action Plan serves as a strategic roadmap, guiding the way toward gender equality in the digital innovation hub. It usually includes specific goals, objectives, activities, and timelines to keep things on track. By contrast, a Gender Scorecard serves as a helpful evaluation tool, tracking progress and holding everyone accountable. It utilizes indicators, ratings, and comparisons over time to reveal where strengths lie and where there may be room for improvement, helping everyone stay focused on the path forward.

TABLE 4: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A GENDER ACTION PLAN AND A GENDER SCORE CARD		
DOMAIN	GENDER ACTION PLAN	GENDER SCORECARD
Definition	A strategic plan outlining steps to promote gender equality	A tool to assess progress and performance in gender equality efforts
Function	What should be done to address gender gaps	What has been achieved regarding gender goals
Components	Goals, objectives, activities, timelines, responsibilities, resources	Indicators, benchmarks, ratings, scores
Time Orientation	Forward-looking – plans for future actions	Retrospective or realtime – evaluates existing performance
Outcome	Guides gender mainstreaming efforts	Helps identify successes, gaps, and areas for improvement
Users	Used by project teams, implementers, planners	Used by evaluators, auditors, stakeholders, oversight bodies



3.3 LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Strong, visible leadership commitment is fundamental to institutional transformation. Research indicates that in organizations where leaders are personally engaged in diversity initiatives, they are 3.2 times more likely to report substantial improvements²². It is therefore crucial that commitment extends beyond rhetoric to effectively bridge the gender gap. Commitments must be demonstrated through:

- » Appointing Gender Champions, individuals who would promote gender integration at the senior management level.
- » Integrating gender-responsiveness into organizational strategies and KPIs.
- » Consistently emphasizing the significance of gender inclusion to staff and partners.

In the context of Ghana, where leadership is held in high cultural regard, endorsements from hub directors and board members possess considerable influence and have the potential to instigate broader change. It is now imperative to formalize accountability in leadership. Hubs are required to demonstrate their commitment through their strategic planning, recruitment processes, partnerships, and daily operations.



ACTIVITY 2:

LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The following is a tailored training activity focused on leadership commitment and organizational culture for gender responsiveness in a digital innovation hub setting in Ghana.

WORKBOOK: LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT FOR GENDER RESPONSIVENESS

Title : Walking the Talk: Leadership for Gender-Responsive Innovation Spaces

Duration : 60–75 minutes

Audience : Hub leaders, program managers, and senior team members

SECTION 1: WARM-UP REFLECTION

Prompt:

Think about your organization's recent history:

- a. When was the last time a woman or someone from a marginalized group, persons with disabilities, or ethnic minorities was:
 - Given a leadership opportunity?
 - Promoted or publicly recognized?
 - Included in a decision-making space?

²² McKinsey & Company. (2020). Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters.

Take Notes:

b. When was the last time staff members in leadership roles attended training on gender?

Take Notes:

c. What roles can men in leadership roles play as change makers to enhance gender equality?

Take Notes:

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Group Activity Instructions:

In your group, discuss and record your answers.

What values or behaviors are visible in your hub that relate to gender inclusion or exclusion?

What invisible norms, habits, or attitudes might discourage women or marginalized groups?

How are power and leadership distributed?

Group Notes:

SECTION 3: GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT

Tick the box that best reflects your current practice.

Statement

✓ Yes X No ? Not Sure

- I mentor or support women in leadership.
- I ensure diverse representation on decision teams.
- I call out gender bias or exclusion when I see it.
- I collect or use gender-disaggregated data.
- I create space for women's input in program design.

Reflections (think about how you have performed):

SECTION 4: LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT CARD

Write three (3) concrete actions you will take over the next three (3) months to build a more gender-responsive culture at your hub.

My Role/Position: _____

My Commitments:

- I will track my progress by: _____
- I will involve others by: _____

Signed (optional): _____

Date: _____

SECTION 5: MAJOR TAKEAWAYS

What I learned from this session (state key lessons):

What I will do differently starting now:

Tips for the Facilitator:

Collect commitment cards to follow up in 3 months.

Consider displaying commitments in a shared “Wall of Inclusion.”

Revisit the self-assessment quarterly as a leadership reflection tool.



3.4 GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES: RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT

Gender-responsive policies in recruitment, retention, and advancement aim to establish fair and inclusive digital hubs where all groups, including women and men, and marginalised groups have equal opportunities, regardless of their circumstances. This involves tackling gender-based barriers, promoting diversity, and fostering a culture that supports the advancement of all employees.



3.4.1 Recruitment

Gender-responsive hubs proactively attract diverse talent and ensure inclusivity by:

- » Using inclusive language in job advertisements is important. Sometimes, the wording, such as using technical terminology in an advertisement, may discourage women from applying.
- » Advertising vacancies through women’s and marginalized groups’ networks and associations, including WhatsApp groups, informal media, etc.

- » Setting diversity targets for recruitment, particularly for leadership roles.

Evidence suggests that using gender-neutral or explicitly inclusive language can increase the number of women and diverse applicants by up to 42%²³.



3.4.2 Retention

Retention strategies should address specific barriers women, PWDs and marginalized men face, such as:

- Offering flexible working arrangements.
- Providing parental leave equally for all genders.
- Setting up mentorship programs and professional development opportunities targeted at women.

A study by Catalyst found that flexible work environments are associated with higher employee engagement and significantly better retention rates, especially for women²⁴.



3.4.3 Advancement

Meritocratic advancement requires systems to minimize bias. Best practices include:

- Clear, transparent promotion criteria
- Regular performance evaluations based on objective metrics
- Leadership development programs targeting underrepresented groups

Global experience shows that organizations that actively support women's career progression have higher rates of internal promotion, enhancing loyalty and reputation²⁵.

²³ Textio. (2017). Language Patterns That Predict Gender Diversity.

²⁴ Catalyst. (2020). The Impact of Flexible Work Environments on Employee Engagement.

²⁵ Peterson Institute for International Economics. (2016). Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES:

Recruitment, Retention and Advancement Gender-responsive policies in recruitment, retention, and advancement aim to establish fair and inclusive digital hubs where all groups, including women and men, and marginalized groups have equal opportunities, regardless of their circumstances.

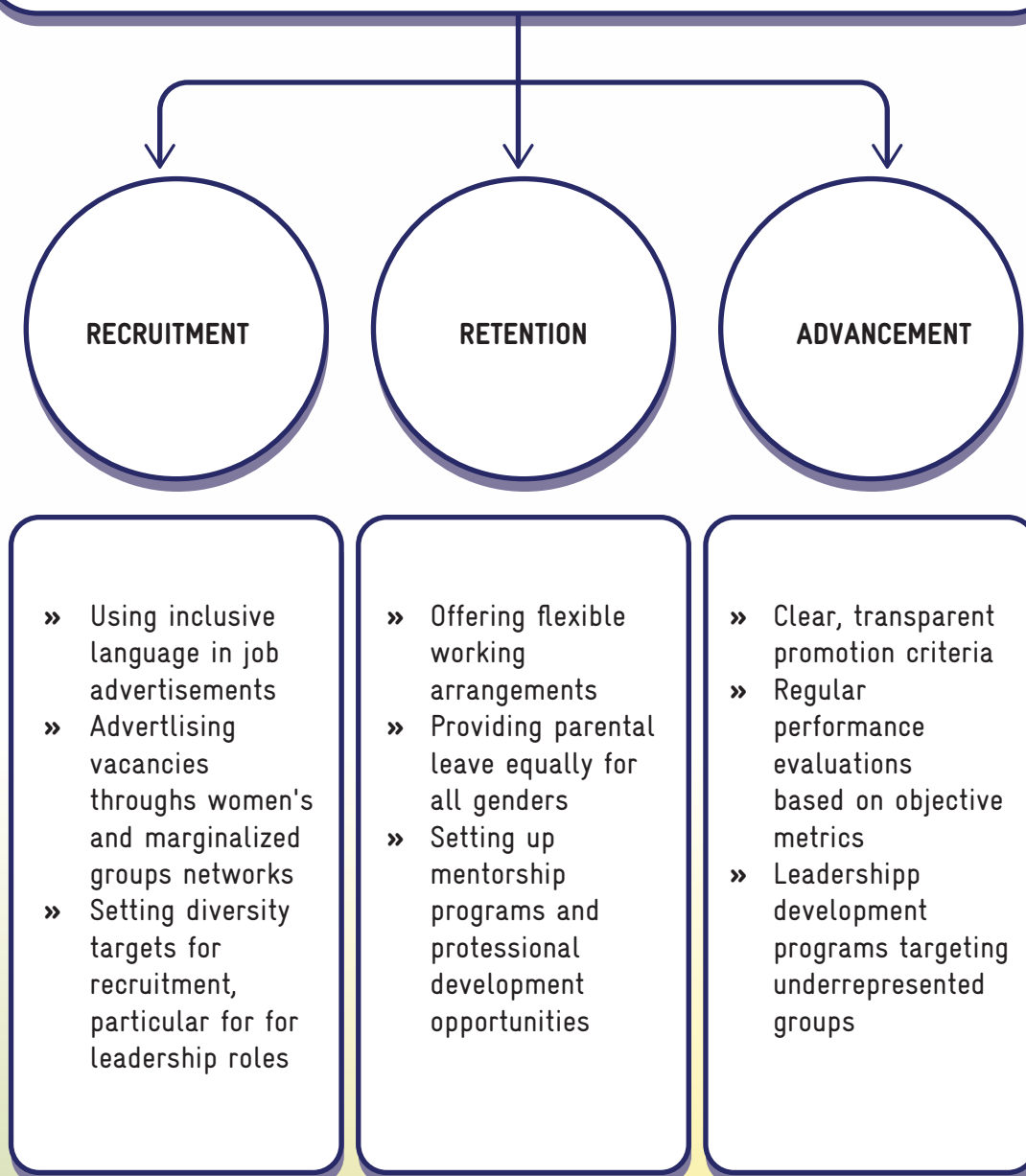


Figure 6: Recruitment, Retention & Advancement



3.5 CREATING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE (INCLUDING SAFEGUARDING POLICIES)

Safeguarding in digital innovation hubs refers to the policies, practices, and systems put in place to protect vulnerable individuals such as women, PWDs, and other marginalized groups from harm, exploitation, abuse, and neglect within digital environments. This includes ensuring that digital platforms, workspaces, programs, and technologies uphold the safety, dignity, and rights of all participants. Safeguarding promotes the well-being of women and men by fostering inclusive, respectful, and secure digital and physical spaces. It is a shared responsibility among hub managers, staff, partners, and the broader tech community. Core safeguarding actions include:

- » Developing a Code of Conduct that explicitly prohibits harassment and discrimination.
- » Training all staff, affiliates, clients, and entrepreneurs on safeguarding principles.
- » Establishing confidential, accessible reporting channels.
- » Conducting regular risk assessments for workplace and event environments.

Safeguarding is especially important in entrepreneurial environments where hierarchical relationships can be fluid, making boundaries more challenging to define. As the World Bank's Gender-Based Violence Good Practice Note advises, establishing preventative measures early can reduce risks and legal liabilities²⁶.



Figure 7: Safeguarding in DIHs

²⁶ World Bank. (2018). Addressing Gender-Based Violence: Good Practice Note for Staff.

EXERCISE:

GUIDE TO DEVELOP A GENDER RESPONSIVE CODE OF CONDUCT

The primary aim of this exercise is to develop a code of conduct that encourages gender equality, inclusion, dignity, and respect for all individuals within the hub and its operational areas.

The following are the Key Steps:

» STEP 1: Reflect on Values and Principles

Task: In small groups, list 5–7 core values that your hub stands for (e.g., respect, fairness, non-discrimination, equal remuneration, etc.).

- » Ensure that at least two values directly promote gender equality and inclusion.

» STEP 2: Identify Gender-Bias Scenarios

Task: Brainstorm common work scenarios where gender bias, harassment, exclusion, or stereotyping could happen (e.g., in meetings, hiring, training, feedback sessions, digital platforms, etc.).

Discuss which behaviors should be encouraged or prohibited (e.g., peer support, mutual re-spect, tolerance, empathy, etc.).

GENDER-BIASED SCENARIOS IN DIGITAL INNOVATION HUBS

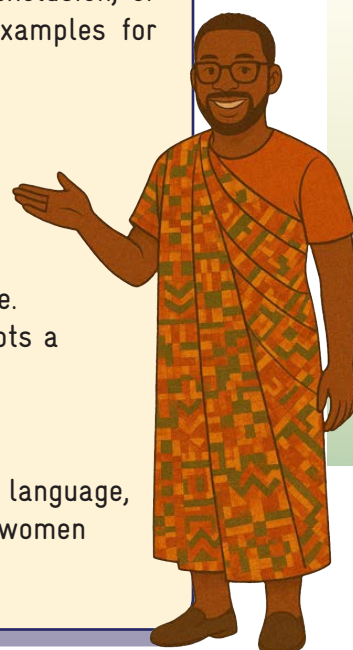
The following is a compilation of gender-sensitive scenarios tailored to digital innovation hubs, such as technology laboratories, co-working environments, and start-up incubators, where issues like bias, harassment, exclusion, or stereotyping may arise. These scenarios serve as practical examples for training, assessments, or scenario-based learning.

1. TEAM MEETINGS AND BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS

- » A woman's idea is ignored until a colleague who is a man repeats it and gets credit.
- » Only men team members are called "developers" while women are referred to as "assistants" regardless of role.
- » A junior man who is a team member repeatedly interrupts a woman speaker during pitch preparation.

2. HIRING AND RECRUITMENT

- » Job advertisements frequently employ masculine-coded language, such as "rockstar programmer," which may discourage women applicants.



- » Interviewers ask women candidates about family plans or childcare responsibilities.
- » CVs of men and women applicants with similar qualifications are evaluated differently, with men seen as more “technical.”

3. TRAINING SESSIONS OR HACKATHONS

- » Trainers focus on men participants when asking or answering technical questions.
- » A woman participant is asked to “handle registration” instead of coding.
- » During a hackathon, men form cliques, excluding women from decision making.

4. MENTORSHIP AND NETWORKING

- » Only men participants are paired with senior developers for mentorship.
- » Women are guided toward “design” or “community engagement” roles while men are pushed toward programming or leadership tracks.
- » Networking events are held in male-dominated settings (e.g., bars) and at odd times, making some women uncomfortable.

5. PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

- » Women receive vague feedback like “You need to be more confident,” while men receive technical feedback.
- » Assertive behaviour by women is labeled “aggressive,” but the same from men is praised.
- » Women’s mistakes are attributed to gender, while men’s mistakes are seen as individual.

6. DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

- » Women staff experience harassment or unsolicited messages via Slack, WhatsApp, or email.
- » Group chats include sexist jokes, memes, or language.
- » During online discussions, women’s technical opinions are challenged more harshly or dismissed.

7. EVENT PLANNING AND PARTICIPATION

- » Panel discussions (“manels”) lack gender diversity only male speakers invited.
- » Event MC introduces men panelists by achievements but refers to women by first names or ‘madam’.
- » Women are asked to handle refreshments or note-taking instead of leading sessions.

8. LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

- » All leadership roles are held by men, even though women are equally qualified.
- » A woman's suggestion to adopt family-friendly policies is dismissed as "soft" or impractical.
- » Important strategic meetings are scheduled at times that conflict with caregiving duties.

9. WORKSPACE ENVIRONMENT

- » Hub decoration, posters, or quotes reflect only men role models (e.g., Elon Musk, Steve Jobs).
- » Lack of breastfeeding rooms or sanitary facilities for women.
- » Unspoken dress code expectations that excessively scrutinise women's appearance

10. PROJECT ASSIGNMENT AND RECOGNITION

- » Women are given project coordination roles while men get technical or lead roles.
- » Men are nominated for awards and public speaking engagements more often.
- » In group projects, the woman's contributions are downplayed or credited to the men who are the lead.

» STEP 3: Draft Gender-Responsive Conduct Rules

Task: For each value and scenario, write 1–2 specific rules or expectations.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- » All staff should use inclusive language and avoid gender stereotypes.
- » Sexual harassment, including jokes and unwelcome attention, is strictly prohibited.
- » All staff members should have a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and harassment.
- » All staff should report abuse in cases involving third parties.

SAMPLE SCENARIOS

1. Scenario: Correcting Language Bias

Context: During a meeting, a team leader refers to all developers as "he."

Response:

A colleague gently says:

Please, let's try using 'they' instead of 'he'—we have got a mixed team,

and inclusive language helps everyone feel seen.

2. Scenario: Challenging Gendered Tasking

Context: At a tech event, the coordinator asks all women to handle registration and refreshments.

Response:

A man who is a participant speaks up:

Actually, I am able to assist with the registration process. Let us reorganise our tasks to ensure that the responsibilities do not consistently fall on the women.

3. Scenario: Addressing Stereotyping

Context: A trainer suggests that the coding tasks be handled by the men and design by the women.

Response:

A participant responds:

Let us allocate tasks aligned with individual skills and interests, rather than gender. We possess great coders and designers across all genders.

4. Scenario: Interrupting Interruptions

Context: A woman keeps getting interrupted while pitching her idea.

Response:

The facilitator says:

"Let's allow her to complete her statement everyone has the right to be heard in its entirety without interruption.

5. Scenario: Redirecting Harassment or Inappropriate Jokes

Context: A staff member who is a man makes a joke about women being "too emotional" for tech leadership.

Response:

A colleague firmly responds:

That joke might inadvertently reinforce some harmful stereotypes. Let's work together to keep this space respectful and welcoming for everyone.

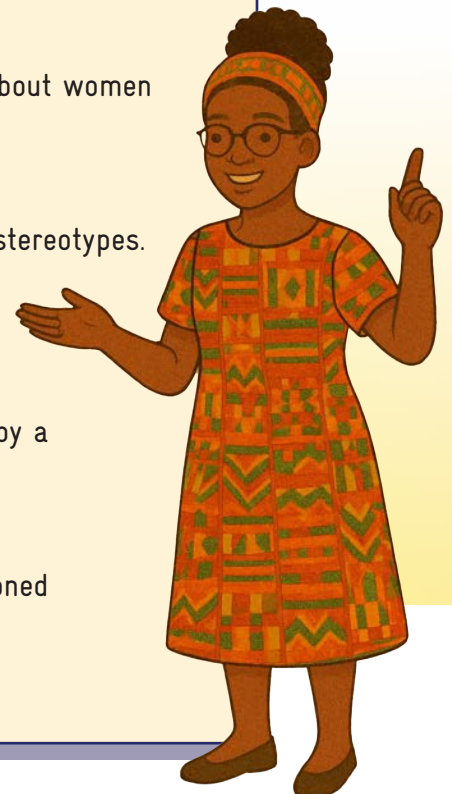
6. Scenario: Reaffirming a Woman's Contribution

Context: A participant repeats an idea initially shared by a woman and gets the credit.

Response:

Another team member says:

Thanks for building on Fatima/Abena's idea she mentioned that earlier, and it's worth exploring further.



7. Scenario: Calling for Gender-Balanced Representation.

Context: An upcoming panel is composed entirely of men as speakers.

Response:

A staff member raises it in planning:

Can we include some women, PWDs, and marginalised groups speakers? Gender balance really adds depth to the discussion.

8. Scenario: Supporting Reporting and Accountability

Context: A junior staff member privately discloses inappropriate behavior from a senior mentor.

Response:

The team lead responds:

Thank you for trusting us. We will handle this confidentially and follow the procedure. You have our full support.

» **STEP 3: Draft Gender-Responsive Conduct Rules**

Task: For each value and scenario, write 1–2 specific rules or expectations.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- » All staff should use inclusive language and avoid gender stereotypes.
- » Sexual harassment, including jokes and unwelcome attention, is strictly prohibited.
- » All staff members should have a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and harassment.
- » All staff should report abuse in cases involving third parties.

» **STEP 4: Ensure Participation and Representation**

Task: Ensure the code of conduct includes contributions from people of all genders and roles, particularly providing space for marginalised voices.

» **STEP 5: Add Reporting and Accountability Measures**

Task: Design a simple and safe mechanism for reporting gender-related misconduct. Include:

- » Who to report to.
- » What protection mechanisms are available for whistle-blowers?
- » Clearly define consequences for violations and ensure these are deterrent enough.

» **STEP 6: Finalize and Communicate**

Task: Create a final version of the code of conduct. Think about how to:

- » Share it effectively among the staff and partners (e.g., posters, emails, onboarding packs).
- » Train staff on it.
- » Regularly review and update it.



3.6 STAFF TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING ON GENDER EQUALITY

Building internal capacity is crucial for maintaining gender-responsiveness. Even well-meaning staff may lack the understanding or skills necessary to turn good intentions into action due to the way gender biases are deeply seated in Ghanaian societies. Training programs should be:

- » Regularly and always required for everyone working at the hubs, from interns to staff, ensuring everyone is on the same page with executives.
- » Context-specific, incorporating Ghanaian cultural, social, and economic realities in the digital ecosystem.
- » Practical and interactive, using real-world scenarios relevant to the hub's work and deriving from the experiences of women and men.



Suggested training topics include Gender and Entrepreneurship, Digital gender Gap

- » **Gender Equality Fundamentals**
 - » Understanding gender concepts, roles, and power relations
 - » Overview of national and international gender equality frameworks and how they shape individual women's and men's lives.
- » **Gender Bias and Inclusive Communication**
 - » Identifying and addressing gender stereotypes
 - » Using inclusive language and practices in written and verbal communication
- » **Gender-responsive Program Design**
 - » Integrating gender analysis into planning and implementation
 - » Ensuring that interventions address the different needs of all genders
- » **Unconscious Bias in Recruitment and Promotion**
 - » Recognizing hidden biases in hiring, evaluation, and promotion processes
 - » Addressing representational issues in ways that move beyond tokenism
 - » Strategies for fair talent management that enable team members to perform at their best

According to UNDP, capacity building with strong institutional incentives leads to more durable organizational change than just offering training alone. This approach also effectively tackles gender issues²⁷.

27 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2016). Gender Equality Strategy

ACTIVITY:

GENDER AT WORK: SEEING, NAMING AND CHANGING EVERYDAY BIAS IN THE HUB

The following is a training exercise on gender equality capacity building tailored for digital innovation hubs in Ghana. It is interactive, context-specific, and aims to challenge assumptions while developing practical skills.

Overview:

This participatory workshop activity engages staff and interns in identifying and addressing gender bias in their work environment. It combines storytelling, scenario analysis, and group reflection to bridge the gap between knowledge and practical action.

Duration: 2.5–3 hours (can be split into shorter sessions)

Target Group: All hub staff, interns, facilitators, volunteers, and leadership

Materials Needed:

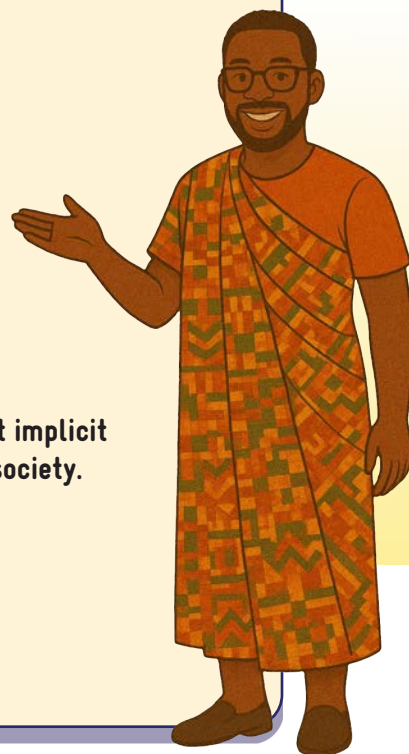
- » Flip charts or whiteboards
- » Markers and sticky notes
- » Projector (optional)
- » Handouts with scenarios and discussion questions
- » Printouts of gender frameworks (CEDAW, Ghana Gender Policy)

STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING ACTIVITY

1. **Opening Icebreaker (15 minutes):** “Gender Lens” Game
Purpose: Warm-up and awareness

Instructions:

- » **The trainer reads out statements such as:**
 - » “Only men can be good coders.”
 - » “Women are too emotional for leadership.”
 - » “It’s easier for men to stay late at the hub.”
 - » **Participants move to one side of the room if they agree, another if they disagree, and the middle if unsure.**
 - » **Discuss as a group, highlighting how these views reflect implicit biases in the digital innovation ecosystem in Ghanaian society.**
2. **Group Exercise: “Gender in Real Life” (45 minutes)**
Purpose: Link gender concepts to local and digital innovation hub realities



Instructions:

1. Divide participants into 3–4 mixed groups.
2. Give each group a Ghanaian workplace scenario involving gender bias.

Examples:

- a. A woman developer is being told to handle event planning instead of leading a team.
- b. A woman is being passed over for promotion due to caregiving responsibilities.
- c. An all-men leadership team selects only men for external speaking roles.

3. Each group answers:

- a. What gender bias is present here?
 - b. How does this reflect broader norms in the innovation hubs and Ghanaian societies?
 - c. What would a gender-responsive response look like?
- Debrief by listing gender-responsive actions from each group on a flip chart.

4. Mini-Teach and Self-Reflection (30 minutes): “Where Do I Stand?”

Topics Covered:

- Gender concepts (roles, norms, power)
- Overview of Ghana's Gender Policy and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- What is unconscious bias?

Reflection Prompt:

Each participant completes:

“A moment I witnessed or participated in gender bias was... If I could go back, I would...” (These are not shared unless participants volunteer.)

5. Interactive Role-Play (40 minutes): “Rewriting the Rules”

Purpose: Practice interrupting bias and communicating inclusively

Instructions:

1. Assign participants common digital hub scenarios from the provided list.
2. In small groups, act out both:
 - a. How bias typically happens (e.g., a sexist joke in a tech team WhatsApp group)
 - b. How to respond with inclusive, respectful language

Debrief with Questions:

- What made it difficult or easy to intervene?
- How can we support each other in challenging bias?



6. Action Planning: “My Gender Equity Commitment” (20 minutes)

Each person writes one specific action they will take in the next month to make the hub more inclusive, such as:

- I will review our job adverts for gendered language.
- I will recommend gender balance for our next panel.
- I will speak out against stereotyping in team meetings.

Post these commitments on a shared board or Slack channel.

Integration and Sustainability Tips:

- Make this training mandatory for all new team members.
- Repeat quarterly with rotating themes (e.g., recruitment, leadership, digital safety).
- Tie participation in this training to access to leadership roles or special projects.

Facilitator Notes:

- Ground discussion in real Ghanaian tech and social norms that govern the way we behave and the roles we assume.
- Use Ghanaian examples of women in leadership (e.g., Regina Honu, Dorothy K. Gordon).
- Respect participants’ comfort levels during reflection sections.



4

Gender-Responsive Program Design and Delivery



Gender-Responsive Program Design and Delivery

→ 4.1 INTEGRATING GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN PROGRAM DESIGN

A well-intentioned gender-responsive program is not just one that includes women; it is intentionally designed to address the unique needs, aspirations, and limitations of different genders from the beginning, enhancing social inclusion.

According to UN Women (2017), successful integration requires applying a **gender lens** at every stage of the program cycle from needs assessment to planning, implementation, and evaluation²⁸.

✓ Steps for gender integration include:

- » Conducting Gender-Disaggregated Needs Assessments: This is important for understanding the different challenges faced by women and men that the hub serves. For instance, a 2021 GSMA survey found that Ghanaian women are 17% less likely than men to own a smartphone. This finding is a critical insight for any digital inclusion program, as it highlights the gap in access²⁹.
- » Setting Clear Gender Goals: Explicitly stating gender equity as an outcome in project objectives enables the hubs to plan effectively and adequately address this.
- » Inclusive Co-Design: Involving women and other marginalized groups in co-creating program content and delivery methods to ensure relevance to their unique needs.



EXAMPLE:

If a hub runs an entrepreneurship program, ensuring that curriculum modules address financing strategies for women-led businesses, who often face unique hurdles in accessing capital, increases effectiveness.

²⁸ UN Women. (2017). Gender-Responsive Programming Handbook.

²⁹ GSMA. (2021). Mobile Gender Gap Report: Ghana.



4.2 OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN AND OTHER MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Simply opening a program to “all” is often insufficient in addressing the unique needs of entrepreneurs who might face social exclusion, such as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. Targeted, thoughtful outreach strategies are necessary to engage women and other marginalized groups.



Best practices include:

- » **Using Gender-Targeted Messaging:** Tailor communication materials to highlight how programs meet the specific needs of women innovators.
- » **Engaging Women’s Networks and Organizations:** Partnering with local groups such as the African Women in Technology (AWIT) network or the Ghana Women in Tech Association, and community-based women’s rights organizations who are in touch with the grassroots can enhance the hubs’ understanding of the context-specific needs of women and marginalized groups.
- » **Scheduling Considerations:** When planning events, hubs need to choose times that fit well with women’s busy schedules, such as after school drop-offs or before evening chores. This way, more women can join and feel comfortable participating.
- » **Offering Travel Stipends or Childcare:** Offering travel stipends or childcare can be an important way to encourage more women to get involved. A survey by Village Capital (2019) found that providing logistical support helps increase women’s participation rates by 30–50%³⁰.

Case Study

THE ASSISTANCE HUB

The Assistance Hub is a youth and women empowerment centre located in Tamale, Ghana, dedicated to providing skills training and resources that help individuals reach their potential. They organize programs such as digital marketing training and have arranged startup summits to support local businesses. Inside the hub, there is a daycare centre, and when a training program is in progress, nursing mothers can leave their children there to be cared for while they focus on the training.

³⁰ Village Capital. (2019). Bridging the Gender Gap in Entrepreneurship.



Figure 8: Daycare centre at the Assistance Hub, Tamale



Figure 9: Daycare center at the Assistance Hub, Tamale



4.3 INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM AND CONTENT DEVELOPMENT IN DIGITAL INNOVATION HUBS

Creating a curriculum that resonates with people of all genders requires attention to what we include, how we present it, and the teaching methods we employ.

Recommendations for inclusive content:

- » Use Gender-Neutral Case Studies: Ensure examples reflect businesses led by women and men equally.
- » Highlight Diverse Role Models: Research indicates that seeing relatable role models can increase women's interest in tech and entrepreneurship fields³¹.
 - » Adapt Learning Materials: Modify learning materials to include simple language and provide content in both English and local languages when necessary, such as English and Twi, Dagbani, Ewe, Hausa, Nzema, Ga, etc.
- » Women and marginalized groups frequently find participatory learning methods more engaging than traditional lectures, especially those that help break down power imbalances. This approach tends to encourage active involvement and makes learning a more inclusive and enriching experience for everyone involved³².



³¹ American Psychological Association. (2019). The Role Model Effect and Girls' STEM Aspirations.

³² World Bank. (2018). Learning to Realize Education's Promise.

CASE STUDY AND AN ACTIVITY: INCLUSIVE TECH SKILLS CURRICULUM AT AN INNOVATION HUB IN GHANA

Case Study: Developing an Inclusive Tech Skills Curriculum at an innovation hub in Ghana

The following is a case study and activity for training on Curriculum and Content Development in Digital Innovation Hubs, focusing on gender inclusion and participation.

Background:

An innovation hub in Ghana realized that although their tech and entrepreneurship training sessions were open to all, women's participation remained below 30%, and engagement from marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities (PWDs) and rural youth was limited.

What were the causes?

Feedback from stakeholders indicated that the curriculum was overly technical, filled with jargon, presented only in English, and predominantly featured men as role models in the tech industry. Learning sessions were lecture-based and intimidating, especially for those new to digital technology.

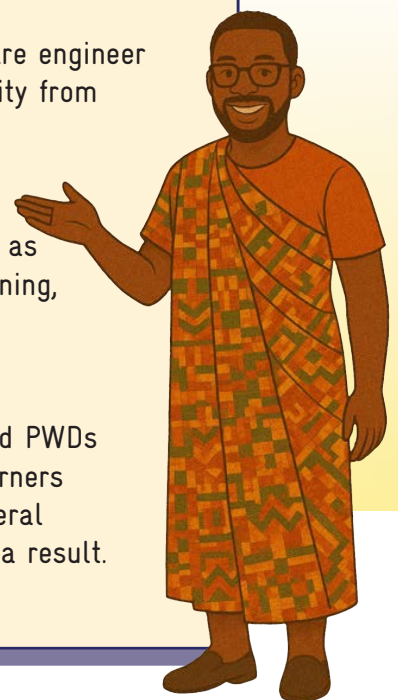
Intervention:

The hub launched a curriculum redesign initiative guided by principles of gender inclusion. Their team worked with gender experts, local educators, and community leaders to do the following:

- » Reframe examples and case studies to reflect businesses and innovations led by women, men, and PWDs.
- » Introduce diverse role models (e.g., a women software engineer from Bolgatanga, a man entrepreneur with a disability from Koforidua).
- » Translate materials into Dagbani, Twi, and Ewe, and use simple language.
- » Train facilitators to use participatory methods, such as storytelling, small-group projects, peer-to-peer learning, and community-based problem-solving.

Outcome of the intervention:

Within nine months, women's participation grew to 52%, and PWDs represented 10% of attendees. Evaluations showed that learners found the new methods engaging and empowering, and several participants launched community-based digital projects as a result.



Activity: Redesign a Module for Inclusion

Objective:

Participants will apply inclusive curriculum development principles to redesign an existing module used in their hub.

Instructions:

1. Divide participants into small groups (4–5).
2. Each group chooses a current training topic (e.g., Digital Marketing, Mobile App Development, or Intro to Coding).
3. Ask them to audit the content using this checklist:
 - a. Does it include case studies featuring women and marginalized groups?
 - b. Are role models diverse?
 - c. Is the language accessible?
 - d. Are local languages available or adaptable?
 - e. Are the teaching methods interactive and inclusive?

4. Redesign Task:

Groups should rewrite one section of the module (e.g., an introduction or a case study) to:

- a. Include a gender-neutral or women-led case study.
 - b. Highlight a diverse local role model.
 - c. Translate a portion into a local language.
 - d. Add a participatory method (e.g., group activity or simulation).
5. Presentation and Reflection:

Groups present their redesign. Discuss:

- a. What changed?
- b. What impact do they expect?
- c. What challenges might arise in implementation?



4.4 MENTORSHIP AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL INNOVATION SPACE

Mentorship and access to professional networks are vital drivers of success, yet women consistently report less access to both compared to their male counterparts. The aim of mentorship is to enhance the capacity, confidence, and visibility of women entrepreneurs by providing access to experienced mentors and inclusive professional networks. Mentorship enhances women's confidence, social capital, and business skills by connecting them with

more-established industry figures. This can help them access markets, finance, and technology more effectively, as well as foster a community of support to sustain women-led ventures.



Strategic approaches to mentorship:

- » **Formal Mentorship Programs:** Pair early-stage women, PWD, and marginalized entrepreneurs with experienced mentors in technology or business.
- » **Peer Support Networks:** Facilitate women-only peer circles to provide safe spaces for collaboration and mutual support.
- » **Inclusive Events:** Ensure panels, hackathons, and competitions include women as judges, speakers, and participants.
- » In Ghana, initiatives like WES (Women Entrepreneurs Support) have shown that structured mentorship programs can improve women's business survival rates by over 20%³³.



4.5 GENDER-RESPONSIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

Beyond program content, supportive services are vital for enabling full participation.



Key services include:

- » **Childcare Services:** Providing on-site childcare during events or offering childcare stipends. Evidence from African leadership programs show that offering childcare increases women's event participation rates by 35–50%³⁴. In the context of Ghana, since women bear disproportionate burdens of childcare, providing support in this area is essential for enhancing their experiences and the benefits they derive from the hubs.
- » **Transportation Assistance:** Safe and affordable transportation can significantly remove a barrier, particularly in urban peripheral areas where a lack of access may constrain women's mobility.
- » **Flexible Learning Options:** Online modules, hybrid learning formats, and asynchronous participation options can help women balance education with family and work commitments.
- » By offering these supports, hubs not only demonstrate a commitment to inclusion but also unlock a broader, richer talent pool.

Case Study

At the Ghana Innovation Hub, a Kids' corner has been created, furnished with baby cots, play toys, and books, to make it easier for staff and users of the hub to bring their children along to programs and events.

33 WES Ghana Initiative Report. (2021). Impact Assessment Study.

34 African Leadership Academy. (2020). The Impact of Childcare Services on Women's Leadership Training Participation.



Figure 10: Kids corner at the Ghana Innovation Hub

Picture of a kids' corner at the Ghana Innovation Hub in collaboration with Orange Corners Ghana³⁵

³⁵ https://www.facebook.com/ghanainnovationhub/photos/a.1054213058291612/1454881978224716/?_rdr



5

Community Engagement and Partnerships



Community Engagement and Partnerships

➔ 5.1 BUILDING GENDER-INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Community engagement and strong partnerships are critical for Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) to broaden their gender-responsiveness beyond internal practices and program delivery. Hubs do not operate in isolation; instead, they are part of broader ecosystems and communities that either reinforce or dismantle barriers to inclusion.

Building gender-inclusive partnerships involves intentionally collaborating with stakeholders who promote gender equality and empowerment. These partnerships can:

- » Enhance resource mobilization (e.g., access to grants focused on women's economic empowerment).
- » Expand outreach to diverse groups.
- » Provide expertise on gender-specific needs and solutions.



Potential partners include:

- » Women-centred organizations (e.g., African Women's Development Fund, Women in Tech Africa, Women's Rights Organisation, CSOs).
- » Academic institutions (gender studies departments, technical universities).
- » Financial institutions offering women-focused credit schemes
- » Development partners (e.g., UNDP, USAID, GIZ) running programs on women's economic empowerment
- » Private sector allies committed to diversity and inclusion

Example: The "Tech Needs Girls" initiative in Ghana successfully partnered with Vodafone and other corporate actors to scale STEM mentorship for girls³⁶.

Tip: When forming partnerships, it is crucial to ensure that gender equity goals are explicitly stated in Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) or collaboration agreements.

³⁶ Tech Needs Girls Ghana. (2021). Annual Report by International Needs Ghana.



5.2 WORKING WITH WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND NET-WORKS



Women's organizations are invaluable allies because they bring:

- » Direct connections to women entrepreneurs, tech workers, and aspiring innovators.
- » Insights into barriers and effective engagement strategies.
- » Capacity for co-creation of initiatives that are contextually relevant and community driven.



Engaging such organizations can take multiple forms:

- » Co-hosting events (e.g., hackathons for women entrepreneurs).
- » Co-developing mentorship programs.
- » Joint advocacy for policy reforms that support women in tech.

Tip for Hubs: Adopt a participatory approach – involve women's organizations from the planning stage rather than inviting them after key decisions have been made. Participatory planning builds trust and ensures relevance.

Ghana Example: The Soronko Academy, a tech initiative focused on girls and women, has scaled significantly through strong collaborations with NGOs, schools, and international organizations, becoming one of the leading examples of gender-inclusive tech training in West Africa³⁷.



5.3 ENGAGING MEN AS ALLIES AND CHANGE MAKERS: PROMOTING SHARED RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS

While women-focused initiatives are essential, creating lasting systemic change requires the active involvement of men. Men's leadership dominates much of the tech and innovation sectors globally and in Ghana; thus, their buy-in can accelerate gender equity efforts. Support from men for gender integration can genuinely amplify the cause and enhance its credibility. It is therefore important to see everyone working together to promote the voice of equality.



Strategies for engaging men as allies include:

- » Awareness campaigns that highlight how gender equality benefits everyone, not just women.
- » Inclusive training sessions that target both men and women, emphasizing shared responsibility

³⁷ Soronko Academy. (2022). Impact Report: Bridging the Gender Digital Divide.

- » Champion programs, where men leaders publicly advocate for gender equality in tech and entrepreneurship
- » Encouraging male mentorship of women innovators, while also supporting the growth of women-to-women mentorship networks

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), initiatives that engage men alongside women are 1.5 times more effective at achieving workplace gender equality³⁸.



Case Study

1. The "HeForShe Tech Initiatives" in several African countries have demonstrated that framing gender inclusion as a shared mission – rather than a women-only issue significantly increases organizational commitment and sustainability^{39, 40}.
2. MEDA's "Male Gender Activist" Initiative, Ghana: As part of the Greater Opportunities for Rural Women (GROW) project, MEDA recognized that meaningful women's empowerment requires engaging men not just as gatekeepers but as active allies. They trained 17 men champions in gender equity, who then educated peers through community sensitization, advocated for women's rights, and facilitated harmonious relationships between family members and women participating in the program. This approach reframes men's roles from passive enablers to active participants in achieving gender balance in rural digital initiatives⁴¹.

³⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO). (2019). Women in Business and Management: The Business Case for Change.

³⁹ UN Women. (2020). HeForShe Impact Report: Engaging Men in Gender Equality.

⁴⁰ https://www.mogcsp.gov.gh/official-launch-of-heforshe-campaign-in-ghana/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴¹ <https://www.meda.org/marketplace/engaging-men-to-promote-gender-equity/>



6

Examples of Roles of Partners in Gender Responsiveness in Digital Innovation



Examples of Roles of Partners in Gender Responsiveness in Digital Innovation

➔ 6.1 BUILDING GENDER-INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

PARTNER	ROLES IN GENDER RESPONSIVENESS	EXAMPLES
MEDIA	Create awareness on gender gaps in digital innovation » Set advocacy agenda for gender-inclusive policies » Profile women role models in tech » Challenge gender stereotypes in ICT reporting	- Media houses feature women in STEM and entrepreneurship - MTN Heroes of Change highlighting women innovators - Joy Learning Channel showcasing girls excelling in ICT - Tech Women Dialogue in Accra amplified by national media
TRADITIONAL LEADERS	Mobilize communities to support women's digital inclusion » Mediate cultural barriers restricting women's digital participation » Endorse digital literacy programs to boost legitimacy » Facilitate access to ICT centres and resources	- Chiefs in Northern Region supporting Girls in ICT Initiative (Ministry of Communications) - Upper East chiefs endorsing SEND Ghana's digital literacy for women farmers- Bono Region chiefs hosting Girls in ICT events - Traditional authorities providing land for ICT centres

RELIGIOUS LEADERS	» Promote ethical framing of gender equality in tech » Influence social norms through faith-based teachings– » Advocate and mentor for women’s ICT training. » Provide safe spaces and facilities for digital learning	- local churches, mosque and communities supporting girls’ education campaigns - integrating ICT in youth programs - Embedding ICT education in schools - Churches and hosting after-school ICT training
ENTERPRENUERS	» Actively participate in design and feedback for digital solutions » Create peer learning and mentorship networks » Demand accountability in gender-responsive innovation » Serve as role models and change agents in communities	- Entrepreneurs designing ICT training for girls - Women in Tech Africa and Developers in Vogue creating mentorship networks - Hubs pushing youth-led gender-inclusive innovation - Girls in ICT Day Ghana showcasing hun-dreds of girls coding and networking





7

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) for Gender-Responsiveness



Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) for Gender-Responsiveness

➔ 7.1 SETTING GENDER-SENSITIVE INDICATORS

Effective monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) are crucial for ensuring that gender responsiveness is not merely aspirational but achieved through measurable outcomes. Without proper measurement, initiatives risk remaining superficial or ineffective.

Setting gender-responsive indicators allows Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) to track progress, learn from experiences, and adjust strategies accordingly. Indicators should be:

- » **Specific** : Clearly define what is being measured.
- » **Measurable** : Use quantifiable metrics whenever possible.
- » **Achievable** : Reflect realistic expectations given resources and context.
- » **Relevant** : Align with the hub's gender goals and broader mission.
- » **Time-bound** : Include clear timelines for achievement.

Table 6: Examples of Gender-Sensitive Indicators

AREA	SAMPLE INDICATOR
PARTICIPATION	% of women and marginalized groups among program participants
LEADERSHIP	% of leadership roles held by women in the hub
CAPACITY BUILDING	Number of gender equality training sessions held per year
SATISFACTION	% of women reporting satisfaction with program relevance and support
OUTREACH	% increase in applications from women-led startups over baseline

According to UN Women, using both quantitative and qualitative indicators provides a fuller picture of progress⁴².

⁴² UN Women. (2017). Gender-Responsive Programming Handbook.



7.2 COLLECTING AND ANALYZING SEX-DISAGGREGATED DATA

A foundational principle of gender-responsive MEL is collecting sex-disaggregated data – that is, separating data by gender identity categories whenever possible. This enables hubs to:

- » Identify participation and benefit gaps.
- » Monitor whether interventions are closing or widening inequalities.
- » Design targeted corrective actions.

BEST PRACTICES FOR DATA COLLECTION:

- » Ask gender identity respectfully and provide inclusive options (e.g., men, women, non-binary, prefer not to say).
- » Collect additional contextual data (e.g., age, disability status) to capture intersectionality.
- » Protect participant confidentiality to avoid harm, especially for marginalised identities.

Globally, less than 30% of innovation programs report regularly collecting sex-disaggregated data – a gap that Ghanaian hubs can address proactively to strengthen gender inclusion⁴³.

EXAMPLE:

Tracking the percentage of women-led startups that received venture funding through the hub's accelerator program could highlight whether additional support mechanisms are needed.



7.3 LEARNING LOOPS: HOW TO INTEGRATE FEEDBACK FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Beyond tracking numbers, learning loops ensure that insights gained from MEL activities lead to real change. A gender-responsive learning loop includes:

1. Data Collection: Gather sex-disaggregated data and qualitative feedback.
2. Analysis: Identify trends, gaps, successes, and emerging needs.
3. Reflection: Hold dedicated sessions (e.g., quarterly team reviews) to interpret findings through a gender lens.
4. Adaptation: Revise programs, policies, and strategies based on insights.
5. Communication: Share learnings internally and externally to build transparency and accountability.

Organizations that use learning loops are 70% more likely to achieve diversity and inclusion goals⁴⁴.

⁴³ OECD. (2021). Measuring Gender Equality in Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

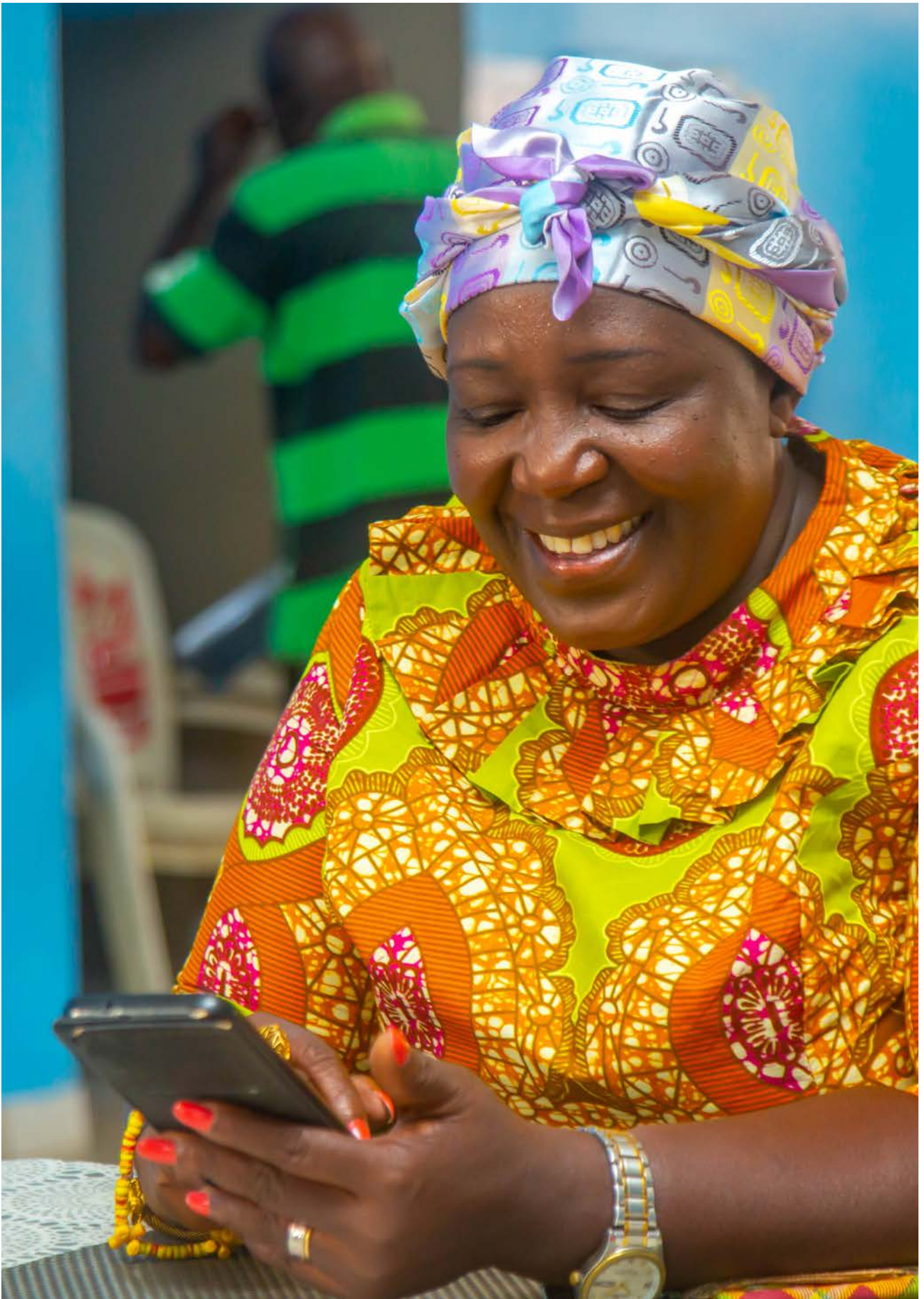
⁴⁴ McKinsey & Company. (2017). Delivering Through Diversity.

EXAMPLE:

Impact Hub Accra regularly hosts community reflection events, allowing participants – particularly women and marginalized groups – to co-create solutions, leading to iterative improvements in program design⁴⁵.

Practical Tip: Build gender MEL responsibilities into staff roles and not treat them as add-ons. Institutionalizing responsibility ensures that learning is ongoing rather than occasional.

⁴⁵ Impact Hub Accra. (2022). Annual Learning Report.





8

Appendices



Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample Gender Audit Questionnaire

Gender Audit Survey Questionnaire

Instructions: Read through the questions and reflect on your organization. For each statement, rate how much your organization is doing that activity. Use the scale below to rate each item from 1 to 5:

1	2	3	4	5
To a very small degree	To a small degree	To a moderate degree	To a large degree	To a very great degree

Part A: Organizational Gender Integration

Please rate the following statements:

No.	Statement	Rating (1-5)
1.	The integration of gender equality in programs/projects is mandated in my digital hub.	☐
2.	My digital hub has a written policy that affirms a commitment to gender equality.	☐
3.	Senior management actively supports and takes responsibility for the implementation of the policy (or for promoting gender equality if no policy exists).	☐
4.	There has been an increase in the representation of women in senior management positions in the past few years in my digital hub.	☐
5.	My digital hub has budgeted adequate financial resources to support gender integration work.	☐
6.	There is a person or division responsible for gender in my digital hub.	☐
7.	Staff have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitude to carry out their work with gender awareness.	☐
8.	Project teams in planning, implementation, and evaluation consist of members who are gender sensitive.	☐
9.	These teams include at least one person with specific gender expertise.	☐
10.	Gender analysis is built into our program planning and implementation procedures.	☐
11.	Gender analysis is built into our program evaluation procedures.	☐

12.	Data collected is disaggregated by gender.	☐
13.	The gender impact of projects and programs is monitored and evaluated, and lessons are learned.	☐
14.	Programs contribute to the empowerment of women/girls and to changing unequal gender relations in our local communities.	☐
15.	Gender awareness is included in job descriptions and/or performance criteria.	☐
16.	Gender issues are taken seriously and discussed openly by men and women in my digital hub.	☐
17.	The hub has a reputation for integrity and competence on gender issues among peer organizations.	☐
18.	The working environment for women has improved in the past two years.	☐
19.	Staff is committed to the advancement of gender equality.	☐
20.	The hub has made significant progress in mainstreaming gender in operations and programs.	☐

Part B: Open-Ended Questions

21 What do you think your organization should do to mainstream gender equality?

Response:

22 Describe any successes or challenges you have experienced in integrating gender into your work.

Response:

Source: Modified from the Gender Audit Handbook: A Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment and Transformation

Part C: About You

1. Are you: ☐ Woman ☐ Man

2. What is your position in the organization? ☐ Support Staff ☐ Administrative Staff ☐ Program Staff
☐ Management Staff

3. How many years have you worked at your organization? ___ years

4. Where is your base of work located? ☐ Field Office ☐ Headquarters

5. What best describes your department? ☐ Technical Program Office ☐ Administrative/Human Resources ☐ Executive Office ☐ Contracts/Finance ☐ Other: _____

6. What is your age? ___ years

Appendix 2: Gender Action Plan Planning Meeting Agenda (sample)

- » Introductions (if necessary) and/or icebreaker
- » Overview of agenda (clarification of expectations and objectives)
- » Review materials: 1) questionnaire results presentation, 2) focus group report
- » Discuss the hub's commitment to gender integration under the following themes:
 - a. political will, technical capacity, organizational culture, and accountability.
 - b. Identify key recommendations for each of the themes.
- » Create a chronological order of recommendations (which ones should happen first, second, third, etc.).
- » Agree on key recommendations, timelines, responsibilities, and the necessary resources.
- » Put the recommendations into practice.

Appendix 3: Gender Action Plan Template Based on the Assessment

Identify priority areas where the hub can improve and develop strategies to address those gender gaps. For each key area that scored low, outline the necessary steps. Here is an example of how to proceed with developing a Gender Action Plan.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTION STEPS	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S)	RESOURCES NEEDED
Leadership Commitment	1. Hold leadership workshops on gender sensitivity. 2. Develop a gender equity pledge for all leadership members.	3 months	[Gender expert]	Gender training, external facilitator
Gender-Sensitive Program Design	1. Implement a system for collecting sex-disaggregated data in all programs. 2. Analyze gender-specific outcomes regularly.	6 months	[gender expert, MEL]	Access to gender analysis tools, training resources
Data Collection and Analysis	1. Implement a system for collecting sex-disaggregated data in all programs. 2. Analyze gender-specific outcomes regularly.	4 months	[management/gender expert/MEL]	Data collection tools, training for staff

Gender-Responsive Recruitment	1. Review and update recruitment policies to ensure gender neutrality. 2. Ensure job postings are accessible to women and gender-diverse individuals.	2 months	[management/gender expert/MEL/HR]	HR resources, gender-sensitive job boards
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List of stakeholders who contributed to the validation workshop of the toolkit, which took place during the Ghana Hubs Network annual gathering in Accra on 24th July 2025.

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