SDG 5 is now online

Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." The inclusion of a gender perspective in ICTs as well as internet governance, both in policies and implementation, is what will contribute to women, girls, and queer and trans persons' rights online and enable them to take part in and contribute to an inclusive, equal, and diverse Information Society, and internet governance space.t

In order to "5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere" in the digital space, the digital divide in access to technology has to be addressed. The proportion of women using the Internet is 12% lower than that of men globally [1], and this number is much bigger is several countries and regions. It's imperative that access to technology is increased for women and girls, especially in countries where the internet is now taking a stronger root. The gender gap also extends to how this technology is then used. Women and girls' usage of mobile phones and internet is constantly monitored, with families constantly enquiring about their mobile phone usage, demanding to check their messages, and surveilling their usage. The norm should change to one in which women and girls freely participate in digital spaces.

In 2015, there was a Request for Comments document circulated within the IETF which spoke up about how an "American, white, male" culture was affecting good ideas and discussions.[2] According to a 2017 survey in the ICANN community, 66% of females said that "ICANN's community is male-dominated", and also that those with non-binary gender identities were least likely to agree that there are equal opportunities for all genders.[3] Analysis of the Gender Report Cards from the 2016 IGF in Mexico showed that only roughly 50% of the workshop organisers filled in the Gender Report Cards even 7 years after they were introduced. This attitude towards gender reporting is concerning because if we don't have the information on the current status, it is difficult to take steps to close the gap. To implement goal 5.5[4] in the digital space, the technical and decision making bodies of the internet need to become more diverse.

The lack of sufficient check on online violence has turned ICTs into a disabler of women's rights and empowerment, and that of queer and trans persons. These communitie routinely face abuse, harassment, and violence in digital spaces, and all of this directly hinders achievement of goal 5.b[5]. Policymakers and internet users take online abuse and harassment seriously and address this in various ways. When bringing in policies and legislations as per 5.c[6], it is very important that these policies and legislations are not protectionist. They should be rights based, and as per the needs of the women, and not what others think women need. This is applicable to right to privacy, access, freedoms of expression, association and assembly in the digital space, and should connect to their lived realities and everyday lives.

Digital rights are not separate from other rights of women, girls, queer and trans persons. Similarly, to truly "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls everywhere", this and other goals cannot just remain in the physical space. They too need to get online.

Endnotes

1. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2017.pdf
2. https://goo.gl/Uupjoh
3. https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/gender-survey-complete-11oct17-en.pdf
4. 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decisionmaking in political, economic and public life.
5. 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.
6. 5.c adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.