AFRICA CDC DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

African Women in Digital Health (AWIDH)

1. Background and Objectives

1.1 Background

Despite having the highest percentage of adult women engaged in entrepreneurial activity globally, African women face significant challenges, including lack of financial investment and digital literacy, which impede their ability to fully reap the benefits of digital transformation. For example, in Senegal, **36%** of women cited reading and writing as a barrier to mobile access compared to **12%** of men.

It is estimated that only about **30%** of the African population has access to the internet. Women are also excluded from digital jobs, networks, and business associations that connect job seekers to the tech industry. There is a need to have more women in tech jobs to enable them to attract, mentor and coach other young girls. Access to finance was the most identified barrier to starting a new business, faced by **67%** of respondents. Only **18%** reported having obtained a bank loan and less than **2%** had accessed microfinance. Banks remain reluctant to finance start-ups, which they consider a risky investment, and women often lack sufficient financial guarantees. African women continue to face barriers to fully participating in the digital economy as creators and consumers of technology. They are underrepresented and marginalized as tech entrepreneurs with. UNESCO estimating that only **30%** of women in Sub-Saharan Africa receive STEM training and participate in the tech sector. Fewer girls than boys possess the critical digital skills needed to compete in the modern labor force.

The socio-economic impact of digital development shows that gender equity is crucial for inclusive development. Consequently, the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy has set a goal of digital inclusion, including digital health, for every African by 2030. To achieve this goal, concerted efforts must be made now to remove barriers for African women and girls to engage fully in the digital economy and create an enabling environment for technology-oriented entrepreneurship.

The proposed movement has been initiated following discussions between Africa CDC, Speak Up Africa and the Ministry of Health of Senegal on low participation of women in the digital space and the need to reverse this trend to support health related SDGs and the Agenda 2063.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1   General Objective

The African Women in Digital Health Program will address the digital health gender gap by creating a community platform that brings together stakeholders working on health and/or gender issues to collaborate on actions for women's meaningful engagement and leadership in digital health.

1.2.2   Specific objectives

- Support the design and implementation of national policies, strategies and action plans on digital health and ensure that the gender lens is included.
- Advocate for the operationalizing of digital health strategies at country and regional levels including strong participation of women.
- Increase the representation and leadership of women in the digital health space.
- Promote and develop capacity strengthening programs for women in the health and digital space including partnerships, mentorships and coaching programs.
- Establish a platform on African women in digital health to strengthen the voices of African women.
- Strengthen the capacity of men and women in gender mainstreaming in digital health policies and programs.

2. Approach

2.1 Expected outcomes

- Effective representation of women at all levels in the digital health space
- Inclusion of women and girls in digital health policies and strategies at the national and regional levels
- Reinforced soft skills of women in digital health at all levels of the health system (communications, leadership, business, marketing etc.)
- Increased visibility of African women in digital health leadership roles
- Community support and career development for African women in digital health
- Strengthened skills for Africa CDC's Digital staff in gender mainstreaming

2.2 Strategic orientations

2.2.1   Strategic orientation 1: Capacity Strengthening

Through this strategic orientation, we aim to increase the number of women equipped with essential soft skills necessary for success in the digital health sector. This includes areas such as communications, leadership, gender mainstreaming, business, and marketing. A baseline study will be conducted to set realistic expectations regarding the percentage of women involved. Additionally, the staff of Africa CDC will receive gender mainstreaming training to enable proper

follow-up and sustainability of these initiatives.

Webinars and workshops will be organized to facilitate experience sharing among networks of women, health workers involved in digital health, and other stakeholders. Coordination with Africa CDC will be documented and disseminated across the African region. Additionally, a mentorship program will be launched to connect experienced professionals with young female entrepreneurs and health workers, fostering a supportive environment for growth and development in the digital health sector.

2.2.2   Strategic orientation 2: Enabling environment

To advocate for policies that support women's full participation and leadership in the digital health ecosystem, the program will focus on creating a supportive environment through partnerships and collaborations with key stakeholders. This includes advocating for national and regional digital health strategies that incorporate a gender lens and promoting gender-disaggregated data collection to inform policy decisions.

Once the network is established, a mapping of women leaders in digital health will enable the identification of strong women leaders and young women with high potential. The goal is to create a functional network that advocates for reforms and policies to increase women's participation in digital health. Ensuring that a gender perspective is included in digital health policies and strategies across Africa is essential.

A baseline study and the mapping of women in digital health will help identify countries that have developed or are in the process of developing digital health strategies. AWiDH can then support the revision of these strategies to include a gender lens. Additionally, a champion engagement strategy will be developed to amplify the voices of African women in digital health at all levels, thereby increasing their leadership and influence.

2.2.3   Strategic orientation 3: Investment

This orientation aims to secure adequate financing for women in digital health, with a particular focus on women entrepreneurs in the tech and digital health space. An award program will be launched to support at least 50 women in enhancing and growing their digital health startups. Additionally, a mentorship program will be established with rigorous selection criteria for mentors, ensuring they are recognized leaders in their technology or health technology fields. Mentors will also undergo boot-camp style training in communications, leadership, and business to ensure they are well-prepared to guide and support their mentees effectively.

3. Action Plan, Timeline and Staffing

3.1 Action Plan

Strategic orientations	Outcomes	Deliverables
Capacity strengthening	Reinforced skills of women in digital health at all levels of the health system (communications, leadership, business, marketing etc.)	At least 5 digital health strategies/policies reviewed to include a gender lens
		At least 80 % of staff of ACDC trained
		At least 6 webinars organized from 2023 to 2025 (three specific webinars per year)
		At least 4 workshops organized per year, 2 in 2023 and 8 in 2024-2025 during high level meetings and Fora (Africa Health Tech Summit, Forum Galien, Women Deliver, Africa, Innovation week, Helina Conference, HealthTech Hub Africa meetups and summits, etc.)
		Functional knowledge sharing platform with at least one best practice or toolkit documentation shared per semester
	Strengthened skills for Africa CDC's Digital staff in gender mainstreaming	One gender mainstreaming curriculum developed for Africa CDC staff
		At least two training sessions for staff at Africa CDC in Addis Ababa
Enabling environment	Effective representation of women at all levels in the digital health space	One map of women leaders in the African digital health ecosystem
		One network of African women in Digital Health
		At least one focal point per region to start regional chapters

Strategic orientations	Outcomes	Deliverables
	Increased consideration of women in digital health policies and strategies	At least 5 digital health strategies/policies reviewed to include a gender lens
	Increased visibility of African women in digital health leadership roles	One champion strategy plan developed and implemented
		AWiDH communication platforms are functional
		5 young women efficiently mentored to become youth leaders
Investment	Providing financial resources to women entrepreneurs through an Award program	Mapping of promising women entrepreneurs in digital health in Africa
		Two subregional award ceremonies (West-Central and East-South) for selected women entrepreneurs each year

3.2 Timeline

The timeline for this Flagship is **from Q2 2023 to Q4 2027** (please see Excel attachment)

3.3 Organization and team

3.3.1   AWiDH Secretariat and working group

As a flagship initiative of the Africa CDC Digital Transformation Strategy, the African Women in Digital Health (AWiDH) project has been co-created with Speak Up Africa and various partners. Speak Up Africa leads this initiative, with a dedicated working group comprised of partner organizations providing advisory support for the project's implementation.
All project outputs undergo validation by the working group before proceeding, ensuring that the initiative remains collaborative and reflects the collective efforts of all stakeholders. This collaborative approach guarantees that the project aligns with the shared vision and goals of the partners involved.
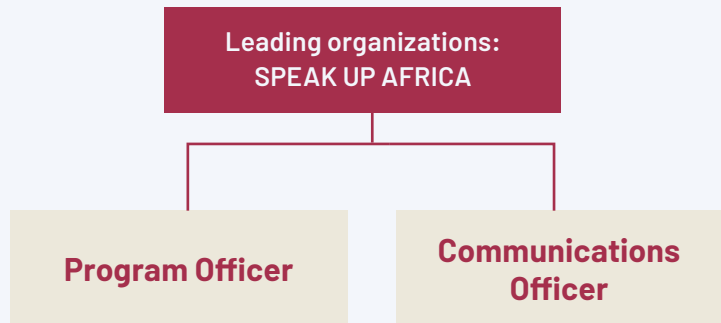
3.3.2 Proposed Organigram from 2024

Figure 2: Organigram

Program Officer

The PO will be responsible for ensuring the interventions, timeline, and budgets are well organized. He/She will communicate with Speak Up Africa and other AWiDH stakeholders to keep informed of any changes to the action plan. He/She will regularly report back to the hosting entities that will also liaise with stakeholders and funders of this initiative. In addition, he/she will organize the recruitment of consultants, liaise with experts from partner organization to ensure a proper project implementation. The PO will support the hosting entities in resource mobilization such as, seeking grants and proposals. He/She will ensure that AWiDH activities align with the goals and mission proposed in line with Africa CDC digital transformation strategy. The PO will report directly to Speak Up Africa.

Communications Officer

The communications officer (CO) will support the initiative for the overall communication of AWiDH. He/She will support the elaboration of communication and champion engagement strategies, the dissemination of AWIDH productions, the elaboration of press releases and blog posts, and the organization of events and conferences. The CO will also ensure availability of communication tools, regular information on AWiDH, etc.

4. Financing and partners

4.1 Budget

4.2 Working group partners

- ECOWAS Gender Development Center (EGDC)
- I-DAIR
- IMMAP
- Intra Health
- John Snow Inc SI/CHISU
- PATH
- OpenHIE (OpenHealth Information Exchange)
- Master card Foundation
- Novartis
- PSI
- Quala
- Regenstrief
- Resolve to Save the lives
- Rwanda Events
- Ministry of Health and Social Action, Senegal
- Speak Up Africa
- The Common Project
- The Global Fund
- Transform Health
- UNICEF
- USAID
- Village Reach

5. Success Factors

- Coordination of network
- Political will
- Effective mentorship and award program in place to support women in digital health
- Engagement of stakeholders, civil society,
  private sector, government, local authorities, etc
- Adequate financial support

6. Immediate next steps

- Develop and disseminate AWiDH communication tools, including branding guidelines and a comprehensive website.
- Resource mobilization for the implementation of the action plan
- Organize and conduct a series of webinars focused on digital health and gender equity, aimed at building capacity and raising awareness among stakeholders.
- Launch the AWiDH mentorship program to connect young female entrepreneurs and digital health workers with experienced mentors in their field.
- Begin the process of mapping and revising national digital health policies to include a gender-sensitive approach, ensuring they support the inclusion and leadership of women.

GENEVA DIGITAL HEALTH DAY

African Women in Digital Health (AWIDH)

EMPOWERING AFRICAN WOMEN IN DIGITAL HEALTH: STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP

Context

Women and girls are not only excluded from access to training and education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), but also from education that promotes general digital literacy. UNESCO estimates that only **30%** of women in Sub-Saharan Africa receive STEM training and participate in the tech sector. Fewer girls than boys possess the critical digital skills needed to compete in the modern labor force. Women are also excluded from digital jobs, networks, and business associations that connect job seekers to the tech industry.

Women are underrepresented and marginalized as tech entrepreneurs. There is a need to have more women in tech jobs to enable them to attract, mentor and coach other young girls. Women's inclusive participation in digital health is crucial to achieve SDG 3 and the health agenda 2063 objectives of the African Union. Including women in the digital economy in Africa creates enormous opportunities for reducing inequality, achieving development and inclusive economic growth. Thus, the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy has set a goal of digital inclusion including digital health for every African by 2030. To achieve this goal, concerted efforts must be made now to remove barriers for African women and girls to engage in the digital economy and to create an enabling environment for technology-oriented entrepreneurship and policies. This will contribute to jobs creation for youth and women especially in social business areas enabling more health outcomes.

The AWiDH initiative

African Women in Digital Health (AWiDH), officially launched during the 2nd Annual International Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA 2022) in December 2022 in Kigali, is an initiative to address the digital gender gap through a multidisciplinary platform bringing together stakeholders working on health issues to ensure effective collaboration and coordination action for women's meaningful engagement and leadership in digital health.

The movement relies on three strategic objectives:

1. **Capacity building:** Increasing skill set by addressing digital capacity building needs for women to build a strong pipeline of talent
2. **Enabling environment:** Supporting the enabling environment for women entrepreneurship in digital health
3. **Investment:** Ensuring adequate investment for women entrepreneurs in the tech digital health space

The workshop

This 90-minute workshop will unveil and deconstruct the hurdles faced by African women in digital health; advocate for gender-inclusive digital health policies and strategies at both national and regional echelons; and develop strong and actionable strategies to fortify the representation and leadership of African women in the digital health ecosystem at all levels.

This begins by laying the groundwork for an engaging and interactive session. Thirty participants will be invited to take part in this collaborative space for open dialogue and shared learning. They will work together on the following segments and share with the larger group:

- **The first segment will follow a World café format:** a dynamic discussion in which participants explore the key challenges that African women face in digital health. Each table will have a few minutes to discuss, before digging into deeper conversations with the larger group, encouraging participants to share their experiences and insights. The fruit of those conversations will crystallize into a 'Challenge Map', painting a vivid picture of the obstacles at hand. **(20 mins)**

- **The following segment shifts towards advocacy and action.** Participants will transform the challenges identified into tangible policy recommendations. This activity is designed to stimulate strategic thinking and collaborative solution-building, with an objective of developing concise recommendations that form the policy proposals to address each challenge previously identified. **(20 mins)**

- **The third segment of the workshop** will focus on an exchange of opportunities and solutions aimed at reinforcing African women's representation and leadership in digital health. This will facilitate the exchange of innovative ideas, best practices, and successful strategies, empowering participants to contribute to and shape the future of African women in digital health. **(20 mins)**

By the end of the workshop, we will have all the elements to create the 'African Digital Health Equity Roadmap', a comprehensive guide that outlines the steps, strategies, and commitments needed to close the digital gender gap in health. It will encapsulate the experiences, recommendations, and actionable steps identified, serving as an advocacy tool for stakeholders to foster a more inclusive and empowering digital health ecosystem for African women.

Target Participants

The workshop aims to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including global and regional health organizations, ministries of health, ICT and education from African Union countries, health advocates, digital health professionals, healthcare practitioners, health entrepreneurs, and health regulators and policymakers.

About Speak Up Africa

Speak Up Africa is an African-led, Africa-based organization dedicated to building an Africa where growth and sustainable development are driven by Africa's own citizens. We convene, enable and advocate. Focusing on strategic communications, policy and advocacy, we are dedicated to supporting African leaders and citizens to take an active role in identifying and developing solutions to tackle the challenges facing our continent — including malaria, NTDs, immunization, sanitation, gender equality and global health research and development.

We leverage our relationships with governments, communities, media, civil society groups, business leaders and critical global policy movers and decision-makers to create dialogue and inspire long lasting change. We are deeply connected to the countries we work in while also being citizens of the world who understand the global landscape —from funding trends to policy priorities and regulatory processes — and we are well positioned to connect the global with the local, and vice versa.

Everything we do is aligned with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union's Agenda 2063 and with national priorities, with an eye on guaranteeing that every man, woman and child is empowered to live a long and healthy life.

EMPOWERING AFRICA WOMEN IN DIGITAL HEALTH : STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP

Date : May 30th, 2023
Location : Campus Biotech, Geneva,Switzerland

WORKSHOP AGENDA

INTRODUCTION
(10 MINUTES)

• Welcome and opening remarks
• Presentation of workshop objectives
• Introduction to AWiDH Initiative
• Context and relevance

SEGMENT 2: WORLD CAFÉ
(20 MINUTES)

• **Objective:** Facilitate open dialogue to explore key challenges and find solutions.
• **Process:** Participants will rotate tables to discuss predefined questions related to:
Capacity Building / Investment /Enabling Environment

SEGMENT 3: DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS *(30 MINUTES)*

• **Objective:** Transform identified challenges into concrete policy recommendations.
• **Process:** Group discussions

SEGMENT 4: SOLUTION EXCHANGE AND CAPACITY BUILDING *(20 MINUTES)*

• **Objective:** Share successful strategies and solutions to enhance women's representation in digital health.
• **Process:** Presentations by participants and interactive discussion.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS
(10 MINUTES)

• Present preliminary steps for the **«Roadmap for Digital Health Equity in Africa.»**