PRINCIPLES

FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

Led By Digital Opportunity Trust

ADVANCING DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN THE FUTURE GREEN ECONOMY

Humanity's future, and its sustainability, is heavily dependent on our ability to adapt and apply technology. Harnessing the power of digital tools and skills for the good of the planet is one of the world's critical tasks. A major challenge in our drive to build societies that are both climate sensitive and technologically 'smart' is to ensure that no one is left behind. We continue to face a serious global gender gap insofar as access to digital skills and digital infrastructures is disproportionally denied to women and girls. As a consequence, and because of the relationship of climate change and technology, the impact of climate change is amplifying the risks and challenges that already exist for women and girls, putting added pressures on their daily lives that can force them further into poverty. The principles that follow are designed to guide efforts to put women and girls at the center of a just transition to a digitally-enabled green economy. The principles respond to the complexity and urgency of the work, they embrace holistic thinking, they are intersectional in approach, and they are transformative in the priority applied to local agency, ownership and reality. The principles underpin a vision of an incredible future – one in which women and girls are the catalysts for the world's sustainable progress.

From May to November 2023, Digital Opportunity Trust hosted a 7-month multi-stakeholder Sprint Group within the World Economic Forum's EDISON Alliance. Composed of members from the digital inclusion space: Dell, Nethope, Dubai Cares, Goodwall, The Digital School, and UNICEF.

The Sprint Group, *"Advancing Digital Inclusion For Young Women in the Future Green Economy"*, developed a set of principles for increasing the participation of women and girls in the green economy, with an acute focus on the role of climate change, digital technology, skills and gender equity.
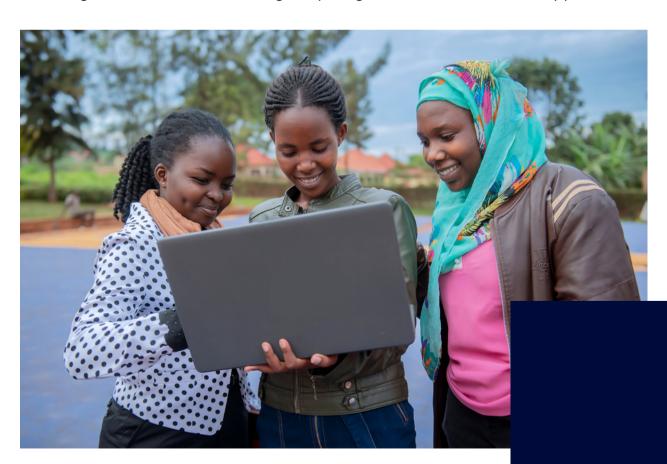
PRINCIPLE 1
Think Digital, Act Local

Recognizing that places and situations all have their unique attributes, the realities are most accurately understood by those who are living it. Initiatives for digital inclusion in a just green economy must therefore be rooted in local realities. This includes recognizing and fostering the knowledge, wisdom and expertise of the women and communities they serve. The realization of climate justice will be a result and reflection of the local context of the community with its particular needs and aspirations. Ensuring local agency and ownership over digital inclusion projects is fundamental because it nurtures the necessary capacity, autonomy, and empowerment of individuals and communities to make greener decisions, to initiate informed actions, and to influence outcomes that directly affect their lives and well-being and respond to the local environment.

Supporting local agencies to achieve digital inclusive workforces also creates new opportunities for young women, particularly organizations in the global south with programs involving environment and climate programs where women can apply their experience on the community front lines of climate advocacy and action. It is important to apply a climate lens at the beginning of all projects, especially those dealing with digital inclusion, to ensure that environmental considerations are not siloed, but rather form an integral and cross-cutting part of the project.

PRINCIPLE 2
Leave No One Behind

There are many ways in which young women are marginalized. Therefore, the efforts to ensure women participate in the green economy must also follow an intersectional approach that considers how women's experiences are influenced by a range of contexts, including specific social, cultural, and economic situations. This will avoid examining single instances of marginalization in isolation, since various social factors typically combine to create unique and complex systems of privilege and discrimination. The gender digital divide is exacerbated by many systemic socioeconomic challenges, including poverty. For example, roles and responsibilities for unpaid care work further economically marginalized women and frequently limits their physical participation and access to opportunities. Furthermore, additional factors negatively influence the learning experiences of young women, including their access to basic necessities, gender-based discrimination, reduced societal expectations, and limited access to financial resources, scholarships and mentorship opportunities. To mitigate these impacts, an "ecosystem" approach is recommended with close attention paid to the enabling environment surrounding the young women who are to be supported.

PRINCIPLE 3
Representation Matters and Mentorship Pays Off

An important aspect of enabling women's participation in the green economy is the demonstration that they have an important place in digital technology and innovation spaces, and that there is gender-sensitive support available to thrive in these environments. For example, through mentorship relationships, a robust support system can be established – one that extends beyond technical skills, providing young women with guidance to help them deal with a wide range of professional challenges. This includes helping them demystify and navigate what can be intimidating spaces, for instance understanding legal rights, or accessing financing to launch a climate action start-up. Mentorship relationships, whether through peer networks or one-on-one support, must embody the values of trust and safety. They should also be accessible, meeting women where they are through proactive outreach, rather than expecting individuals to discover opportunities on their own. This both reduces gender inequalities in the broader ecosystem and also ensures that initiatives are accessible and relevant to the particular needs of young women. Finally, by amplifying the visibility of role models, especially women professionals and teachers in STEM, and encouraging leadership roles in climate initiatives, self-confidence will be instilled and young women will be inspired to see themselves as integral contributors to these fields.

PRINCIPLE 4
Don't Forget Soft Skills

Supporting the transition to a low-carbon green economy and filling the new green jobs that are resulting requires the right skills to catalyze technical, social and green transformation. Participating in the green transformation space requires specific technical, instrumental, and adaptive change-management skills. This must be taught, but it is not enough. Because women have long faced exclusion from these spaces, it is equally important to build "soft" skills - the cognitive and socioemotional skills such as self-confidence, a growth mindset, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking and decision making skills, among others. A holistic approach applied to training curricula and skills-building initiatives will provide women the psychological foundation to thrive, with the oft-overlooked capacities that complement technical skills.

PRINCIPLE 5
Create Safe Spaces

Emphasizing the significance of safe spaces, the final principle advocates for the establishment of closed groups exclusively for women, particularly those that will bring together like-minded women pursuing green career paths. These peer-to-peer, women-only environments foster collaboration, support, and a reassuring sense of security. Effective safe spaces provide a platform for open dialogue and shared experiences, fostering an environment where young women feel free and empowered to express themselves without reservation. More broadly, it is critical that learning spaces, workplaces, community networks and climate action movements become safer spaces for all community members, and serve to confront the pervasive lack of safety and persistent gender-based violence that we see across the globe.

CONCLUSION

These principles do not try to be a one-size-fits-all solution for fostering digital inclusion in the green economy. Instead, meaningful change will come about as a result of initiatives that recognize the multifaceted nature of the challenge and the various barriers that must be addressed in tandem with one another. A holistic approach includes promoting local ownership, agency and expertise, recognizing and addressing intersectional structures of marginalization, prioritizing mentorship and the creation of safe spaces, and cultivating the "soft" skills that are necessary to apply new technical capacities effectively.

By embracing these principles, we are laying the foundations for a future where digital inclusion is synonymous with a just transition to a prosperous green economy - a green economy in which every young woman has the opportunity to contribute, innovate, and thrive. Through the conscientious application of the principles, we aspire not only to bridge the existing gaps, but to create a ripple effect of empowerment that extends beyond individual interventions, irreversibly establishing the landscape of digital inclusion in the green economy in the Global South.