

**Statement on national initiatives on progress made in women's participation and closing of gender gaps in national digitization processes.**

I am pleased to participate in today's meeting which provides an opportunity to advance the conversation on the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The COVID -19 pandemic has highlighted the urgency of addressing the gender digital divide and has shown us that digital exclusion exerts a strong negative influence on girls' and women's future prospects, including reduced access to education, employment opportunities, essential services and information.

Gender-equitable digital inclusion has become a major national priority of the Government of Guyana.

The liberalization of Guyana's telecommunications sector has expanded the range of ICT services available to the population. The reduction in digital connectivity costs of various services to consumers, especially low income women, allows affordable connectivity.

Recognizing that access to affordable digital services in the COVID-19 context is not a luxury but a necessity, our Government is committed to ensuring equitable access to women and girls while working to ensure a safe online environment that is free from abuse, harassment and bullying.

Guyana has begun to foster an inclusive, digital nation through investments in digital skills development programmes.

The Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) programme is a comprehensive programme that aims to empower and enable women to become financially independent. This free programme which has benefitted over 2000 women, and which has no admission criteria, is open to women across the country and offers training which includes ICT and business literacy. This is linked to a female-centric business incubator that offers tangible support to all women on completion of training.

Female entrepreneurs can now access free digital business and marketing Apps which offer vital business tips, tools for business growth, support and networking opportunities. Over 3,000 women are expected to benefit. These digital investments will provide new avenues for the economic empowerment of women while advancing Guyana's socio-economic progression.

A Gender-based violence App linked to the domestic violence hotline provides key support services and information to survivors who are vulnerable to the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls.

Guyana has embarked on the ICT Access & E- Services Project for Hinterland Poor and Remote Communities Project valued at approximately USD\$17.4 Million. Two hundred (200) Hinterland Poor and Remote underserved communities will benefit from fully equipped ICT hubs and increase the access of girls and women in rural and remote areas to accessible digital connectivity, with the aim of closing the digital gender gap.

In 2021, the government of Guyana's 'Girls in ICT programme' facilitated training in programming and other STEM activities for a total of 70 girls, as part of an initiative to bridge the digital divide for gender equality.

Our Government is addressing the digital divide that hinders women's access to technology while also creating an enabling environment for women's leadership and inclusion in policy formulation, development of new technology and educational opportunities for girls in STEM.

This inclusive strategy is critical to our success in overcoming other inequalities that pervade the digital sphere. Women and girls should not only be end-users of digital technologies, but they too must be included in every step from the initial design phases.

By promoting digital technology and digital connectivity, Guyana is making significant strides in bridging the gender digital divide and accelerating digital transformation.