



AQOCI's CQFD ADVOCACY at CSW67

Setting the Context

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis underlined the importance of digital access, at a time when the constraints of confinement and the deterioration of the living conditions of the poorest people, particularly girls and women, prevented schooling from taking place in traditional physical locations and resulted in the loss of jobs. It is therefore important to develop a gender perspective in order to better harness digital technology for the benefit of populations in general and girls and women in particular. This applies to education, online work and eliminating isolation, especially in times of crisis.

As the UN Secretary General has pointed out, the dematerialization of many services offers unique opportunities to empower women as economic, social and political actors. Digital technology can indeed generate improved living conditions and open up new educational, economic and political opportunities for girls and women. However, the digital transition, which is often presented as creating equal opportunities, in fact, perpetuates a mode of innovation that is insensitive to gender, social inequalities and inequalities between the global North and the global South.

A perspective of women's rights and gender equality, aimed at better putting digital technology to work for girls and women in education and the economy, only makes sense if it is interwoven with a perspective that counters the hegemony of a small group of firms over the world's cyberspace, such that the commodification of private digital information generates immeasurable profits and where content, including educational content, is under the dominance of these international firms. The two giant hubs that dominate the fierce competition in digital technology on a global scale, the American hub, known as GAFAMI, and the Chinese hub, known as BATX, monopolize the investment in the construction of the data centres that store digital data and the undersea cables that carry them. Thus, all of the added value is captured by foreign infrastructures, everywhere around the world, regardless of location! This big data is used via artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms to further the strategic economic and political interests of powerful parties, while legislation on cybersecurity and personal data protection leaves much to be desired in most of the global South and even in a number of Northern countries. Over the last few decades, AI has become a tool of hegemonic economic and political power over the world. This power is growing exponentially. This apparent soft power contains at its roots violence applied to people's lives on a planetary scale, in virtual absence of ethical rules and governance. It has demonstrated its ability to influence voters in the North and to reinforce political authoritarianism in some countries of the global South. This virtual globalized system that attracts local added value to foreign economies is called cyber-colonization.

A strategy of women's rights, gender equality and social justice that harnesses digital technology for girls' and women's empowerment education must incorporate the perspective of countering this colonial system. It must focus on the fostering of local capital and knowledge in digital investments in the global South, while giving civil society, and in particular feminist NGOs, a central role in challenging sexist educational content and countering the marginalization of women and violence against them in cyberspace. It is by questioning gender, race and North-South inequalities, while taking into account the environmental footprint, that a feminist digital strategy can be put into perspective. It is in this sense that the CQFD proposes this plea based on five recommendations.

AQOCI's CQFD takes the opportunity of the 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) from March 6 to 17, 2023 in New York, under the theme linking technological innovation in the digital age, education and the empowerment of girls and women, to call on all States to institute transparent and participatory governance mechanisms for cyberspace, in multilateral and national frameworks. Such transparent governance is necessary to counter the massive, global commodification of private digital data that harms individuals and groups. This governance must also include the establishment of deontological codes to be enforced by legislation to counter algorithmic regulation reflecting sexist and or racist biases. It must put at the centre of its concerns the promotion of accessibility to digital technology for vulnerable groups (women, LGBTQI, people with disabilities, citizens in the Global South and particularly in the rural world).

The technological dependence of countries in the Global South on international firms threatens the sovereignty of peoples and the freedom of individuals. While contributing to the establishment of a transparent governance of cyberspace, the states of the Global South must make the choice to invest locally in digital technology by mobilizing the resources and knowledge of their citizens: capital, technological knowledge, educational knowledge, knowledge of human rights, women's rights and gender equality. Northern states will have to fully support this, notably through their policies and international cooperation programs. Moving towards these two major changes (transparent and participatory governance of cyberspace and empowerment of the global South in its digital future) is essential to succeed in the challenge of feminist and gender digital justice. The United Nations must promote a central role for civil society in countering the extractivism of minerals for the digital technology industry, especially in the Global South. A central role must also be given to feminist NGOs to promote local education that challenges patriarchal content and where online training would only be complementary. These NGOs must also be very involved in the promotion of gender equality in cyberspace, by fighting against sexist and/or racist hate speech and behaviours as well as against the algorithms that favour them.

For a feminist digital future, AQOCI's CQFD advocates to the CSW67 for five key recommendations that will transform gender and power relations

GOVERNANCE

INSTITUTE TRANSPARENT AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE OF CYBERSPACE

SOVEREIGNTY

MOBILIZE LOCAL RESOURCES AND KNOWLEDGE IN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH BASED ON THE NEEDS OF THE POPULATIONS

EDUCATION

PROMOTE A CENTRAL ROLE FOR FEMINIST NGOS IN LOCAL ANTI-SEXIST EDUCATION WHERE ONLINE LEARNING IS ONLY COMPLEMENTARY

CYBER FEMINISM

INVOLVE FEMINIST NGOS IN PROMOTING THE PLACE AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN CYBERSPACE ON THE BASIS OF GENDER EQUALITY

ENVIRONMENT

COUNTERING THE EXTRACTIVISM LINKED TO THE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY AND PROGRAMMED OBSOLESCENCE

GOVERNANCE

INSTITUTE TRANSPARENT AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE OF CYBERSPACE

Whereas:

- The investment and profits of digital technology are concentrated in the hands of a minority of international firms;
- AI through different platforms relies on the latest advances in neuroscience to deploy increasingly persuasive and addictive techniques to users, so as to influence their perception of reality, their economic and political choices, in virtual absence of regulation;
- The commodification of private data on a global scale by international cyberspace firms for profit and strategic policy purposes is violence against all citizens of the world;
- The virtual absence of legislation on cybersecurity and personal data protection in most countries of the global South and even in several countries of the North.

AQOCI's CQFD advocates for:

With respect to all states

1. Translate into policy decisions the spirit of the UN Global Digital Compact envisaged in the run-up to the Future Summit in September 2024 from the perspective of a concerted effort by all stakeholders to “*define shared principles for an open digital future, for all*” and suggesting substantive issues for good governance (giving people options about how their data is used, enforcing human rights online, and promoting a trustworthy Internet by introducing accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content).
2. Enact multilateral and local cyberspace protection legislation to govern data collection, sharing and use.
3. Legislate against rights violations by transnational corporations and clearly establish the links between digital rights abuses and existing constitutional rights.
4. Revise antitrust laws to intervene more quickly and effectively against market abuse by digital platform companies.
5. Promote mechanisms that facilitate accessibility and equitable distribution of the benefits of digital technologies for sustainable development and gender equality, with a view to a global data patrimony.
6. Ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women as leaders in digital cooperation and ICT and data governance.
7. Promote the creation of spaces for reflection and political debate on moral and ethical issues, including the active consent of individuals who would thus participate in their own governance.

With respect to states in the Global South

1. Implement the African Convention of Malabo which aims to legally frame and protect personal data.
2. Invest in the training of young people and local start-up creators to promote investment by local resources and knowledge in digital infrastructure (data centres, submarine cables, etc.)

SOVEREIGNTY

MOBILIZE LOCAL RESOURCES AND KNOWLEDGE IN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH BASED ON THE NEEDS OF THE POPULATIONS

Whereas:

- The control of the flow of digital data on a global scale translates into the systemic dependence of the countries of the Global South, whose added value is doubly captured by the digital giants, in terms of investment in infrastructure and in terms of exploitation of digital data for economic-political purposes;
- The exploitation commodification of digital data by powerful parties generates the flouting of individual freedoms and the sovereignty of states in the countries of the global South;

- The manipulation of policy choices in collusion between powerful digital parties and local governments promotes political authoritarianism and control of citizens in the global South.

AQOCI's CQFD advocates for:

With respect to the Global South

1. Provide incentives for local capital investment in digital technology.
2. Provide incentives for digital technology partnerships with foreign firms that transfer know-how and contribute to local value-added in digital infrastructure.
3. Promote university courses in computer and digital engineering, encouraging the participation of women.
4. Foster local data sovereignty and governance movements. Example: the Indigenous data sovereignty and Indigenous data governance movements developed by and for the First Peoples of Canada.
5. Develop and support local strategies related to the use of digital data. Example: the popular education strategy that builds digital capacity and citizen participation related to data.

With respect to States and donors involved in development aid

1. Prioritize funding for digital projects by and for communities in the Global South, especially those originating from women, through grants and official development assistance.

With respect to all states

2. Adopt legislation and policy measures to counter the political interference of large cyberspace firms in elections and policy decisions in the global South.

EDUCATION

PROMOTE A CENTRAL ROLE FOR FEMINIST NGOS IN LOCAL ANTI-SEXIST EDUCATION WHERE ONLINE LEARNING IS ONLY COMPLEMENTARY

Whereas:

- Globally, girls are less present than boys in educational fields and in jobs related to digital technology;
- In most countries, only 28% of engineering graduates and 22% of those working in artificial intelligence are women;
- In several countries of the Global South, the educational system suffers from lack of funding and persistent sexist content;
- In cyberspace, the fundamental goals of education, including cultural transmission and collective/community aspects, are directly threatened by the standardized educational content of the North;

- Internationally and digitally dominant languages create barriers in the Global South;
- The rise of online education threatens the physical school and the student-teacher learning relationship.

AQOCI's CQFD advocates for:

With respect to donors, UNESCO and all States:

1. To remedy the lack of governmental budgets in countries of the global South to ensure schooling for all.
2. Establish a regular mechanism to analyze the unknown risks associated with the adoption of cutting-edge technologies in education. In line with the agreement on the ethics of artificial intelligence adopted by UNESCO in November 2021.
3. Take into consideration the knowledge of the South for a better implementation of the Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER) adopted by UNESCO on November 25, 2019. To this end, promote and finance the production of Open Educational Resources (OER) by the global South, involving civil society NGOs and in particular the feminist movement, in order to counter the dominance of Northern knowledge and the persistence of sexist ideology in OER.
4. Promote education and employment of women in digital technology in order to ensure that they participate in technology development on an equal footing with men.
5. Supporting education that is rooted in local cultures, knowledge and community aspirations.
6. Protect local languages in the digital space in relation to the promotion of local knowledge.
7. Teach digital citizenship to children and teens (issues of online safety, privacy, cyberbullying, ethical use of digital media) and transform digital literacy education to combine technical skills with the elimination of stereotypes and gender bias in curricula and behaviour.
8. To strengthen the capacity to respond to crises and disasters, improving the preparedness of education systems to ensure educational continuity during periods of displacement or school closures due to natural or human causes.

CYBER FEMINISM

INVOLVE FEMINIST NGOS IN PROMOTING THE PLACE AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN CYBERSPACE ON THE BASIS OF GENDER EQUALITY

Whereas:

- **Gender-based inequalities are characteristic of digital access**
 - In 2022, globally, 63% of women versus 69% of men were using the Internet;
 - Women are 12% less likely than men to own a cell phone;
 - These averages mask significant differences between regions and within countries, with the gaps being particularly pronounced for older women, those living in rural areas, and women with disabilities;

- Women and girls are 25% less likely than men to have the digital and technological knowledge and skills required to access them. Many have their online activities monitored or take on a disproportionate share of unpaid family caregiving tasks.
- **Gender-based inequalities are characteristic of employment and wages in technology jobs**
 - Globally, in the technology sector, women occupy less than a third of positions, they are paid on average 21% less than men and 48% of them have experienced harassment at work;
 - Gender disparities are also significant in the public sector. Of the IT managers in the 111 countries with such a position, only 11% are women.
- **There is a continuum between physical and online gender-based violence, with technology often compounding the level of surveillance, exploitation, and/or violence.**
 - Globally, among 133 digital systems across different industries, 44.2% suffer from gender bias and 25.7% suffer from both gender and racial bias.
 - Much of the work done to address technology-facilitated violence against women has been fragmented due to the lack of standards and common terminology that explicitly capture the uniqueness of this threat.
- **Automated decision-making algorithms use data from the past to predict future outcomes, making them inherently conservative and predisposed to reproduce or intensify gender, race, or class discrimination.**

AQOCI's CQFD advocates for:

With respect to all states

1. Integrate gender into national digital policies to address the intertwined barriers and discrimination faced by women and girls—so as to ensure universal connectivity especially in underserved areas and so as to promote education and employment of girls and women in digital technology.
2. Mobilize funding for inclusive digital transformation and gender transformative innovation.
3. Establish ethical codes to be respected through legislation to counter algorithms reflecting sexist and/or racist biases.
4. Institute gender impact assessments and regulations that clearly define the responsibilities of digital companies.
5. Involve feminist and anti-violence NGOs to prevent and respond to technology-enabled gender-based violence.
6. Develop, improve, and expand legislation and policies aimed at preventing and responding to technology-facilitated gender-based violence, with input from survivors and feminist NGOs, while expediting processes for removing illegal, harmful, or non-consensual content.
7. Promote digital platforms of social and solidarity economy managed by women.
8. Implement labour regulations and protections for women workers in the platform economy, including a minimum wage and universal, gender-sensitive social protection.
9. To take advantage of the possibilities offered by the digital technology in militant mobilizations and solidarity for the rights of people in general and for those of women in particular.

ENVIRONMENT

COUNTER EXTRACTIVISM LINKED TO THE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY AND LEGISLATE AGAINST PROGRAMMED OBSOLESCENCE

Whereas:

- The digital technology industry is based on the extraction of rare and nonrenewable metals leading to the depletion of abiotic resources, soil and air pollution;
- Digital technology is responsible for the extraction of 22 million tons per year of abiotic resources, such as minerals; mainly extracted in the Global South;
- Digital technology is experiencing one of the largest increases in GHG emissions globally: 3.8% in 2019;
- Global primary energy consumption and the amount of greenhouse gas emissions related to digital technology are increasing by 6.2% and 5.5% per year respectively.
- 53.6 million metric tons of e-waste were generated globally (in 2019) and only 17.4% of this amount is properly collected and recycled;
- 7 to 20% of the waste is exported to the Global South and ends up in landfills in Africa and Asia.

AQOCI's CQFD advocates for:

With respect to all states:

1. Accelerate the ecological and just transition, by supporting local and ecological initiatives.
2. Encourage energy efficiency and the adoption of measures to reduce and recycle digital waste.
3. Promote large-scale technical and financial support for the development of various e-waste collection and recycling facilities.
4. Encourage and promote initiatives by companies that adopt exemplary approaches to environmental sustainability and transparency in the management of electronic waste.
5. Implement data centres that use only renewable energy.
6. Increase the life span of equipment by extending the legal warranty period, promoting reuse and improving the recycling of end-of-life equipment.
7. Map the points of intersection between the environmental, social, and digital agendas, while recognizing their common roots, to support high-level principles.
8. Drawing on feminist politics of *care* to foster an ethic of collective care, in contradiction to current conceptions of extraction, production, consumption, and the elimination of digital technologies.

With respect to the Canadian State:

9. Pass a corporate due diligence law.
10. Encourage Canadian digital companies to extend the life of their electronic devices and penalize those who tend to shorten it.
11. Raise awareness, educate and encourage consumers to adopt responsible and digitally sober behaviours to reduce the environmental footprint.