Input from the CSTD Gender Advisory Board

Why Gender Indicators Are Critical, and Transformative, for the WSIS+20 Review

The finding

The Draft Joint Implementation Road Map for WSIS–GDC Coherence, presented to CSTD at its twenty-ninth session in April 2026, contains the word "gender" zero times. This is the umbrella document that frames how every Action Line facilitator will build the result-oriented roadmaps, with targets, indicators and metrics, that the WSIS+20 Outcome Document requires them to deliver to CSTD by 2027. The Outcome Document mandates gender mainstreaming across all eleven Action Lines. The instrument that operationalises it does not yet carry the mandate. Those roadmaps are being written now. The indicators chosen in the coming months will define what the international community measures, and therefore what it resources and holds to account, for the next decade. The 2027 adoption date offers no comfort: the decisions are being made in the current consultations, not at adoption.

Why indicators, not language

Gender language already exists across the WSIS architecture. What does not exist is measurement: there are no gender indicators embedded in the Action Line implementation frameworks beyond basic access measures. Gender data is collected about the framework, by ITU and the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, but not within it. The result is mentions without measures. A commitment that is mainstreamed but not measured produces reports, not accountability. What is measured is what is resourced; what is left unmeasured quietly disappears from budgets, from reviews, and eventually from the record itself.

An empty slate is also an opportunity. Because no indicators are yet embedded, there is nothing to renegotiate and nothing to displace. The choice is between inheriting the measures we have used by habit and selecting better ones from the start.

What "transformative" means

The indicators we have inherited measure the entrance: how many girls study STEM, how many women use the internet, how many own a phone. These describe women arriving at the door of the digital world such as how many women enter technology professions,. They do not measure the destination, whether women shape technology once inside it: whether they invent, lead, own, govern, and decide, and whether they are safe enough to do so. Transformative indicators measure the destination. They shift the question from who entered to who is shaping the future.

The gap between the two is documented. Women are 18% of inventors across all patent fields, and 16% in AI and digital technologies specifically (WIPO World Intellectual Property Indicators; Mercedes Delgado's analysis presented at the WIPO Women and IP Symposium, 2025). Connectivity statistics have improved for two decades while the authorship figure has barely moved. Entrance indicators cannot see this. Destination indicators are built to.

Why the timeline is not open-ended

The Gender Advisory Board's parallel submission to the CSTD Working Group on Data Governance sets out why the measurement question now carries scientific urgency, not only equity urgency. Data asymmetries compound. Peer-reviewed work on model collapse (Shumailov et al., *Nature*, 2024, and subsequent literature) shows that when AI systems train on data generated by earlier systems, the sparse regions of the data distribution are lost first while embedded biases amplify across generations. The identified remedy, continued infusion of fresh, provenanced human data, works only where such data exists. For women's health beyond the male clinical default, for women's unpaid and informal economic activity, and for women's voices in low-resource languages, it largely does not exist in machine-usable form. Each training generation built on the thinned record raises the cost of correction until correction becomes a re-foundation problem rather than a data problem.

Indicators are how a review process sees this happening. No institution currently measures what share of a frontier training corpus documents female physiology or women's economic activity, and none measures how representational coverage moves across model generations. A review architecture without gender indicators will certify progress on access while the underlying record degrades. That is the specific failure the WSIS+20 Review is positioned to prevent, and only in this window.

Which indicators, and why these

The Gender in Digital Coalition has published a proposed indicator set covering all eleven Action Lines, with data sources and readiness tiers (womenatthetable.net, 3 July 2026). The Board draws attention to the logic of the selection rather than to any single line, because the logic answers the objections that typically stop indicator proposals at CSTD.

The anchor: authorship. The women-inventor rate on AI and digital-technology patents (C6, C7 E-science) is proposed as the first-tranche anchor because WIPO already publishes the data through PatentScope and the World Intellectual Property Indicators, internationally standardised and free. It measures the destination directly, and it removes the "new data infrastructure" objection at source. No indicator proposal should be allowed to fail on feasibility when the anchor requires nothing to be built.

The meta-indicator: governance parity. The share of women in decision-making, not advisory, roles in national digital and AI governance authorities (C1), and of women from low- and middle-income countries on AI ethics and governance bodies (C10), is the single highest-leverage measure in the set, because who decides how systems are built and governed shapes every

other outcome. The ITU Gender Dashboard and body composition records already carry the data.

The precondition: safety with enforcement. Whether national law criminalises technology-facilitated gender-based violence is the floor; the rate at which reported TFGBV results in investigation and prosecution is the destination (C5). No participation measure is meaningful for a population that cannot safely participate, and a law that is never enforced measures nothing.

The validity requirement: representative systems. The share of health AI systems trained on sex-representative data and validated across sexes (C7 E-health, building on WHO Global Digital Health Monitor Indicator 4a), and the share of public AI procurement requiring human rights-responsive, gender-disaggregated impact assessment before deployment (C6, C10). The Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI (CETS 225, adopted, not yet in force) and its HUDERIA methodology supply the assessment architecture. These indicators treat representativeness as a condition of scientific validity, not a courtesy: a model trained on a record that documents one sex is not a general model with a fairness deficit, it is a model of that sex, misdescribed.

The accelerant: time-bound measures. The share of digital cooperation and ODA instruments carrying time-bound Temporary Special Measures under CEDAW Article 4(1) (C11), trackable through OECD DAC gender markers. This connects the indicator framework to existing treaty law rather than to new commitments.

Three readiness tiers govern sequencing. Indicators whose data already exists (WIPO, ITU Gender Dashboard, FAO WEAI, WHO GDHM) can enter roadmaps immediately. A second tier builds on instruments now in motion, including the UN E-Government Survey gender module and the ILO Platform Work Convention under negotiation. Indicators requiring new methodology, principally the algorithmic audit measures, should be routed to the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development for a methodology commission ahead of CSTD 30 in April 2027, so that no proposed indicator is left without an institutional home.

Three points of entry

The Board's asks are deliberately small relative to their reach.

First, where the facilitator-roadmap guidance calls for "potential targets, indicators and metrics," add "including sex-disaggregated and gender-responsive indicators": one line, carried through all eleven Action Lines.

Second, note in the road map's existing paragraph 117 tasking of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development that the indicator review covers sex-disaggregated and gender-transformative indicators, working through a mechanism already mandated and resourced.

Third, place gender indicators in the main body of each roadmap rather than in annexes, because what sits in an annex does not get reported against. The EU non-paper on WSIS–SDG–GDC Roadmaps (24 July 2025) already listed gender equality among the cross-cutting

enablers the roadmaps should include; these steps align the road map with input member states have themselves provided.

The measurement architecture of the digital era is being set now. It will not open again soon.
