



Access to Agency  
**Empowering Women  
Through Digital  
Inclusion**



GHANA INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION (GIMPA), ACCRA - GHANA

WEDNESDAY  
THURSDAY

2-3  
JULY

## **Bridging the Digital Divide: Why Ghana is the Perfect Stage for a Conference on Digital Inclusion and Women's Empowerment**

*The countdown begins to the “Access to Agency: Empowering Women Through Digital Inclusion” international conference that promises to reshape how we think about digital inclusion and women's empowerment in low-and-middle income countries*

On July 2nd and 3rd, 2025, Accra, Ghana will host the **Access to Agency: Empowering Women Through Digital Inclusion** conference, jointly convened by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA). BIGD's deep expertise in digital connectivity pathways—demonstrated by the WEE-DiFine and WEE-Connect Initiatives —combines with IPA's global and local research network and evidence-based approach to create a powerful convergence of expertise, innovation, and urgent necessity to address a pressing development challenge – digital inclusion and women's empowerment.

As one of Africa's most digitally progressive countries, Ghana has made significant strides in mobile connectivity and digital financial services. However, the gender gap in digital access remains pronounced, mirroring patterns across SSA.

## **At the Intersection: Gender, Financial Inclusion, and Technology**

Digital technologies have the potential to leapfrog traditional barriers that have historically excluded women from economic participation. Mobile money platforms, digital marketplaces, and online learning opportunities can provide women with unprecedented access to financial services, markets, and skills development.

Yet reality is more complex. While technology offers transformative possibilities, women in SSA face multiple, intersecting barriers to digital inclusion: limited device ownership, insufficient digital skills, cultural and social restrictions, safety concerns, and economic constraints. These barriers don't exist in isolation; they reinforce each other, creating a web of exclusion that requires sophisticated, multi-faceted solutions.

The conference will explore how to navigate these complexities, moving beyond simple access to understand how digital inclusion can translate into genuine agency and empowerment for women.

### **Why Now? Seizing the Digital Opportunity**

The timing of this conference reflects both urgency and opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption globally, but recent research reveals a troubling reality: while digital infrastructure expanded, existing gender gaps widened. Women, who were already less likely to own smartphones or access the internet, found themselves increasingly marginalized as economic and social activities moved online.

Yet this challenge presents an unprecedented opportunity. Recent studies indicate that closing the gender gap in digital access could add trillions of dollars to global GDP, but the real prize extends far beyond economic metrics. Digital inclusion represents a pathway to agency, enabling women to access information, participate in markets, connect with support networks, and make autonomous choices about their lives.

The decisions made now about digital policy, infrastructure investment, and inclusion strategies will determine whether the next decade delivers on digital technology's promise of empowerment or deepens existing inequalities.

## Key Sessions

The conference unfolds across two focused days, with welcome addresses from IPA's Chief Research and Policy Officer, Loïc Watine; BIGD's Executive Director, Imran Matin; and Ghana's Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Dr. Agnes Naa Momo Lartey. Dean Karlan, (Professor of Economics and Finance at Northwestern University, co-Director of the Global Poverty Research Lab (GPRL), Chief Economist at USAID until recently, and IPA's Founder), will deliver a keynote providing a comprehensive overview of measuring digital inclusion and women's economic empowerment, setting the analytical foundation for the entire conference.

Marieme Esther Dissanou, Director of Gender at the Mastercard Foundation, will also share a keynote message focused on rooting theoretical frameworks in practical implications to ensure that digital empowerment interventions truly reach women. Kym Cole, Director of the WEE DiFine and WEE-Connect Initiatives at BIGD, will also share a brief overview of these groundbreaking initiatives, their efforts to establish inclusive funding practices, and a synthesis of the portfolio's findings to date.

The conference's thematic sessions will provide detailed explorations of specific aspects of digital inclusion. Here is a summary of some of the sessions to look out for:

**Rethinking Women's Empowerment in a Digital World** brings together leading researchers to challenge conventional measurement frameworks, featuring presentations on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)/A-WEAI Indices and groundbreaking research on generating WEE indicators and measuring participation in the digital economy.

**Moving from Measurement to Impact** convenes academics, private sector leaders, implementers, and policymakers to address the persistent gap between research findings and real-world change. This session tackles one of development's most pressing challenges: translating research insights into programs that create meaningful, lasting change in women's lives.

**Women's Use of Smartphones: Expanding Access, Enhancing Autonomy** recognizes that smartphone ownership is often the gateway to digital inclusion. This session will share the much-anticipated results of two impact evaluations of smartphone distribution programs.

**Technology and Women's Work** explores how digital platforms can create new economic opportunities for women. From WhatsApp networking for women entrepreneurs in Ghana to digital financial services for domestic workers in Nigeria, these sessions showcase concrete examples of technology aiming to overcome traditional barriers to women's economic participation.

### **Hedging Against Unintended Negative Outcomes: Privacy, Safety, and Security**

acknowledges that safeguards are essential in the process of including women digitally. Women face unique risks in digital spaces, from privacy violations to financial fraud. This session will explore how to maximize the benefits of digital inclusion while minimizing potential harm, featuring research on digital cash transfers, fraud prevention, and gender dynamics in financial misconduct.

## **Presenting Innovations**

The conference will also feature an exhibition showcasing the work of Ghana-based academics and implementers, recognizing that innovation happens at the local level. The most promising top three projects will be selected by expert panels to receive cash prizes, highlighting the importance of homegrown solutions to local challenges.

This isn't just about sharing research findings — it's about building a community of practice that can drive real change. The conference will bring together leading academics, industry leaders, and policymakers from Ghana and around the world, creating opportunities for collaboration that extend far beyond the two-day event.

BIGD & IPA International Conference

**Access to Agency: Empowering Women Through Digital Inclusion**

**Digital Innovation Exhibition**

Call for  
Poster Presentations!



Deadline: **June 13, 2025**



## **Looking Forward**

The conference represents more than an academic exercise. It's a call to action, a recognition that the digital future we're building must be inclusive, equitable, and empowering for all. The

conversations that happen in Accra will help shape policies, programs, and practices that affect millions of women across SSA.

The path from digital inclusion to women's empowerment isn't straightforward, but it's necessary. This conference will help us navigate that path more skillfully, with better evidence, deeper understanding, and stronger partnerships.

Join us in Accra this July, as we work together to ensure that digital transformation becomes a pathway to women's agency, not just another source of exclusion.

### **Conference Registration**



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