HAPPY WOMEN'S DAY – EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Category: Commercial Law
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In South Africa the month of August is of great significance. It marks Women's month, when the country pays tribute to thousands of women who marched to the Union Buildings on the 9th of August 1956 to protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women. This year Women's month is celebrated under the theme: "**Generational Equality: Realising Women's Rights for an Equal Future**". Although it has been 65 years since thousands of women marched, many women still face discrimination on the basis of gender. Gender inequality still underpins many issues which disproportionately affect South African women.

One such issue is the growing gap in Internet access between men and women. The Internet is

regarded as one of the empowering tools of the modern age. The gender gap in internet access means hundreds of millions of women are missing out on opportunities to use the internet to learn new skills, start businesses, and access healthcare, amongst other things.[1] If left unchallenged this growing digital divide threatens progress on women's equality. [2]

The advent of the 4th Industrial Revolution has necessitated the need to empower women to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the digital age in order to achieve "generational equality". This is inclusive of the recognition of the potential of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a tool to promote gender equality, women empowerment, and digital gender inclusion. The United Nations through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) has recognised that access to the internet is critical to women empowerment. United Nations SDG 5[3] on gender equality, advocates for women empowerment through ICTs.

There are various ICT informed approaches that can be used to promote women's rights and to work towards generational equality. These include the development of gender responsive strategies and policies that enhance women's rights online. Ensuring access to ICTs by women and mitigating or responding to online threats that hinder women's access to and use of technology. Building digital capacities of women and supporting the development of content applications and services that meet women's needs. Promoting women in the technology sector and establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships to pursue practical and joint measures to advance women empowerment.[4]

The achievement of generational equality and the realisation of women's rights in order to create an equal future requires a commitment to women empowerment in the digital age. Including crafting innovative solutions that allow active women participation in the digital economy.

[1] Women's Rights Online – Closing the digital gender gap for a more equal world , World Wide Web Foundation Report, 2020

[2] See above.

[3] Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality

[4] Women's Digital Inclusion: Global and Regional Strategic Efforts for Women Empowerment