

Longer version

I am Dr Theresa Devasahayam, speaking on behalf of Soroptimist International. Thank you for this opportunity to make this statement.

The future of the world is increasingly driven by digitalization. Digitalization drives economic growth, enables better use of resources, supports access to services, brings people together, and facilitates greater flexibility.

Technology has allowed employees to work from home. For women, this means that they can remain in the workforce while continuing their caregiver responsibilities. Countless examples of such jobs prevail: workers in call centres can now work from home; and administrative assistants can schedule the appointments and meetings of their bosses without having to be present in the office.

Digitalization's role in education through the use of technology has never before been as crucial as it is today. Digitalization has allowed for flexibility and openness in the provision of education. Students can access class and course materials through a smart phone or a laptop.

When COVID-19 struck the Philippines, the education system was in turmoil. The pandemic saw the shutting of schools as the deadly virus spread. The question of how to enable students to continue to remain in school was foremost on the minds of policymakers. Teachers were pushed to turn to technology.

But the lack of internet connectivity made it impossible for many, especially students from the poorer rural households, to attend classes. This situation was exacerbated by the cost to students of accessing the internet and their lack of technological devices such as tablets and laptops. Hence, such costs were prohibitive for and a major barrier to the average rural family.

Soroptimist International works at the ground level through hundreds of projects worldwide. Most focus on empowering girls through numerous efforts to educate and empower them.

In the Philippines, Access to Education Project or ATE, established in 2022, has enabled eighty-five tertiary-level female students from lower-income families to complete their TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) education. Recipients of these small grants awarded through the project now have access to digital platforms and have acquired electronic devices at no cost to their families.

Beyond tackling affordability issues, the ongoing ATE project is important for another reason: acquiring digital skills through accessing education online means that young female graduates are better positioned to compete

with their male counterparts in the changing job market. Since most jobs today demand digital literacy, the ATE project serves to close the gender gap in the skilled labour force.

The transformative effects of digitalization permeate our lives. As the world surges forward in this digital age, ensuring an equal playing field for male and female students is paramount. Only then can we speak about a development agenda that is gender inclusive and truly rights-based.

Thank you so much.

(456 words)

Prepared by:

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