Women and Web Literacy

Women and Web Literacy Hub Paper

Executive Summary

Information and communication technologies -- and the Internet in particular -- are increasingly influential across all aspects of life today. When used and promoted properly, the Internet can have a positive impact in women's lives. However, the Internet can also be used to reproduce offline inequalities. Today, half of the world's population -- women and girls -- still faces barriers in accessing and participating on the Web in an equal way. If women are left out of these revolutions, substantive gender equality will not be achieved.

That is why Mozilla is committed to convening a Women and Web Literacy Hub that works with allies, executives, grassroots and young leaders to help women develop the ability to read, write and participate -- equitably and safely -- on the Internet.

This Hub will focus on three fundamental shifts we believe are necessary to achieve the goal of a more inclusive and open Internet that is accessible to all. It will work to ensure that women everywhere are web literate, encompassing a wide range of competencies. It will work for greater representation of women in technology, especially in leadership roles. And it will call for increasing gender equity and inclusion in online spaces, while addressing these within the framework of offline systemic inequality.

Mozilla sees an opportunity to amplify these efforts by focusing on the spaces where the work intersects. Mozilla is driven to build and support an equitable and inclusive online world for everyone. We have unique expertise in teaching the web through locally-relevant curriculum and hands-on learning in community settings. Mozilla's values, commitment and practical experience allow the organization to advance these goals in a collaborative space focused on Women and Web Literacy.

An Inclusive, Equitable and Safe Internet

Women and girls make up half of our world's population, yet continue to face many barriers to equitable participation in society. The Internet is a powerful tool that can be used to challenge or to reproduce this reality.

Creating an Internet where everyone is empowered, safe and independent requires the commitment of allies from all genders and across disciplines.

Mozilla is committed to working alongside allies to help shift the default to one where women everywhere have a strong, equitable role in accessing and shaping the digital world -- and, ultimately, to help create an Internet that reflects the diversity of the people who use it.

There are three fundamental shifts that we believe are necessary to achieve this goal:

All women, everywhere need to be web literate

We live in a rapidly evolving, networked world, where digital technologies are continually stretching to touch almost every aspect of our lives, from health to employment to political participation. In this reality, strong web literacy skills -- combined with 21st century skills like problem-solving and collaboration -- are ever-more important to people's ability to thrive.

Web literacy is more than simply being able to run an effective search or navigate social media. Web literacy also isn't limited to learning how to code. Web literacy is a wide range of competencies that are valuable for everyday life:
- ● Reading on the web. Understanding basic web mechanics used to search for and locate people, resources and information. This includes the ability to judge the credibility of these sources.
- ● Writing on the web. Building and creating web content to make meaning, including how to add information or links to a webpage, ways to remix existing content and basic coding/programming skills.
- ● Participating on the web. Connecting and contributing to communities that share, build and sustain meaningful content online. This includes understanding how to keep content, identity and systems safe.

We know that many women are being left out of opportunities in the networked world. Globally, only 37% of women are online compared to 41% of men. But even having access to the technology doesn't mean women are able to utilize it to its full potential. For example, an increasing number of women in emerging economies are likely to own or have access to a mobile phone, but they are a third less likely than men of the same age, income and educational status to use it for the Internet. Many women also rely on their social circles to learn how to use technologies, which often include other women who face the same challenges. As a result, women are often using the same applications, like Facebook and WhatsApp.

If all women, everywhere possessed the web literacy skills to take advantage of the opportunities the Internet age affords, not only would they be able to fully participate in the increasingly networked world, but they would also be able to improve their lives and the lives of their communities -- and play a stronger role in building an Internet that is open and accessible to all.

Through participatory web learning, Mozilla is creating spaces offline and online to fuel a movement that encourages everyone to share their voice in online conversations. With

over five years of experience in teaching web literacy, Mozilla is well-positioned to lead this effort with strong experience cultivating effective peer-to-peer learning and leadership networks.

Women need to be equally represented in technology, especially in leadership roles

Women have [low representation in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)](#) roles around the globe. The numbers are even lower for historically marginalized communities. Women also encounter a lack of inclusion, support and advancement opportunities within STEM, which results in women who do enter the field being [45% more likely than men to leave within the first year](#).

The impacts of the lack of diversity in the tech sector are also becoming increasingly clear to the public at large. From Apple [neglecting to include a period tracker](#) in the original launch of its Health app, which was designed to provide users with their "whole health picture", to [search algorithms that turn up drastically different results](#) for the term "three white teenagers" versus "three black teenagers," people's experiences are uncovering unconscious biases built right into digital tools used worldwide every day. One important way to address these issues is to increase the diversity of the people building, testing, marketing, working with and making decisions about these technologies.

To this end, there is a recognized movement to get more women involved in the tech sector. As it becomes increasingly evident that all jobs will soon be digital jobs, this work has broadened to focus on increasing women's digital skills for a wide range of professions, from local community work, to boardrooms, to ministries. This strategy is central to helping women build their entrepreneurial and technical skills, ranging from coding to leading startups. It also means shifting the culture of technology companies and related organizations to actively include and highly value diverse working styles.

If women were equally represented in the tech sector, they would be able to drive the creation of more inclusive work cultures and technologies, which in turn would help to create and sustain an open Internet that reflects the diversity of its users and truly puts people first. This is the Internet that Mozilla and our allies want.

We need greater gender equality and inclusion, both online and offline

What happens offline affects women's ability to go online, and these differences are more pronounced in more unequal societies. In general, women earn less than men and having a lower income means they are less able to afford mobile phones, data plans and broadband connections. Certain social and cultural norms also feed into women's participation on the web. For example, a culture that does not approve of women using unfamiliar or [threatening](#) technology can lead to hesitation in embracing ICTs. The

experience and lessons learned from experts focusing on these challenges is undoubtedly applicable to the online world.

Online life is also adding a new dimension to gender equality and inclusion. For example, about 73% of women have had some exposure or experience of online violence. A UN Women Report estimates that 95% of aggressive behaviour, harassment, abusive language and denigrating images in online spaces are aimed at women and often come from people known to the receiver. Even more vulnerable are those who are racialized and those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgender and intersex. We've made progress in addressing these issues unique to online life, but more needs to be done as technology evolves and presents new challenges.

To be effective, efforts to increase the participation, safety and inclusion of women online need to draw on and collaborate with the wealth of experience, knowledge and work focused on increasing gender equity offline.

If there were greater gender equality and inclusion, both online and offline, women would feel and truly be safe, empowered and independent in their online lives. The Internet would act as a vehicle for social change, empowerment, and full recognition of rights.

Current initiatives across public, private, and nonprofit sectors call for gender equity and inclusion in policy and advocacy campaigns. Recognizing the imperative to level the digital playing field, stakeholders have put forward their commitment to bridging the gender digital divide. Their approaches range from campaigns to connect the most underserved populations, to teaching young girls how to code, to advancing women in technology through mentorship and leadership development. Notably, few are as grounded in helping grow and sustain localized networks around the world through connecting learning in action like Mozilla. Mozilla's efforts to teach the web through locally-relevant curriculum and hands-on learning is unique in making the web more accessible and inclusive.

The Opportunity

There is a tremendous amount of important and valuable work already taking place towards creating the three shifts outlined above. Mozilla realizes that initiatives within each one of these domains are successfully being carried out by dedicated stakeholders. The development of any new approach that impacts people requires new skills and strategies. Mozilla can benefit from the knowledge pool of an extensive list of potential partners.

Mozilla sees an opportunity to amplify these efforts by focusing on the spaces where the work intersects. For example,
- Increasing women's web literacy, or generating more inclusive design and content can help women combat online harassment.

- Women empowering each other through learning, teaching and networking related to web literacy skills can help get more women in tech-related positions.

There are specialized leaders working to create the shifts we want to see, but there are few opportunities explicitly focused on building bridges between them.

This is why Mozilla is convening a network of specialists in each of these three areas, to help these strategies bind together and support each other for the greatest impact.

Mozilla's Women and Web Literacy Hub

Mozilla's Women and Web Literacy Hub is focused on building connections between work focused on universal web literacy, women in tech, and gender equity and inclusion, in effort to amplify this work and drive greater collective impact.

Rather than duplicate efforts, our goal is work closely with allies and partner with champions and grassroots leaders who are already making inroads on this work. We also believe that continued training and mentorship is central to the advancement of this work, and so this will also be a criticall component of the network.

How Mozilla Can Contribute

Mozilla seeks champions for this network who will shape and drive the work of this hub. These are leaders and allies who are actively working on women in tech, gender equality and inclusion or web literacy and to advance the principles of the open Internet.

Mozilla will also work with youth and local grassroots leaders who can facilitate learning, organize actions and grow the movement to build an open Internet together. It is important to develop leadership among young men and boys to equally support the goals of a safe and equitable Web.

Mozilla's approach is to work creatively with these established and emerging leaders who want to advance digital learning and teaching practices in participatory and engaging ways. Research shows how in resource-constrained settings, effective and interactive ways to teach digital literacy skills should be a priority that address barriers to learning in the best ways. Supporting community-based learning provides a tangible opportunity for women's empowerment and can lead to greater community benefit overall.

Mozilla's values and principles position it well to convene this hub, focused on:

- Principles over profits and seeks to place individuals in control of shaping the future of the web.
- Diverse communities around the world driving contributions to the web.
- Fuelling new approaches to digital learning with over five years of experience supporting Web Literacy skills in communities around the world.

- Building capacity from the ground up and empowering those who can learn from their networks and drive change in their communities.
- Engaging a network of allies and leaders who bring expertise in women in tech, gender equality and inclusion or web literacy.
- Digital Inclusion occurs when everyone has access and opportunity to participate in building the entire Internet. As more women access the internet, they play a big part in shaping our digital world.
- Web Literacy means ensuring people have the skills to read, write and participate in the digital world. This means we cultivate informed digital citizens who move beyond consuming content, to creating, shaping and defending the web.

Mozilla can support and build an equitable, and accessible web in multiple ways, some of which include:

- Understanding and identifying disparities in the broader context of inequality.
- Creating as well as supporting existing safe spaces online and offline that foster full participation from women.
- Rallying allies and leaders to support this work.
- Developing curriculum for all genders that teaches principles around ethical cybersecurity and how to protect women online.
- Teaching everyone how to eliminate risks like harassment once women are online.
- Affiliating with key organizations to bring in larger communities that can work on the project.
- Providing tangible ways for young leaders to be involved and to rally behind the cause -- leverage grassroots leaders like club captains as advocates.
- Supporting women in STEM education and roles and creating cultural shifts in organizations -- beginning with Mozilla.

Mozilla's Experience

In the past, we've seen success in building networks and movements to increase universal Web Literacy with Mozilla's work by:

- Running campaigns such as **Maker Party** that encourage individuals from various backgrounds to teach the web in their local communities. Mozilla has also run successful campaigns to teach the importance of privacy, net neutrality, encryption and others to global audiences.
- Developing programs like **Mozilla Clubs** that encourage ongoing local events to teach how to read, write, and participate on the web in inclusive and engaging ways.
- Creating tools, resources and curriculum that allow educators and non-educators to teach key Web Literacy skills in both online and offline settings.
- Bringing together existing communities that are working at the intersection of technology, advocacy, education, inclusion and leadership.

More recently we adapted the Mozilla Clubs program in partnership with UN Women to pilot Mozilla Clubs for women and girls and launch 20+ clubs in Nairobi and Cape Town. Through participating in safe, local learning spaces, participants are developing innovative solutions to major obstacles like safety for women online. Mozilla Clubs for women and girls now make up 15% of all Mozilla Clubs and are a testament to how we can create spaces for women to develop their Web Literacy skills, build local networks and collaborate with peers to develop local solutions. Teaching women how to learn the web to participating and developing a better web for everyone.

These sort of opportunities help strengthen communities, open up avenues to acquire new skills, and brainstorm creative ways of addressing prominent challenges in local settings cultivating leaders from their own context. Facilitated trainings empower women, to discover and lead to independent learning opportunities and build community.

> "I have learnt that the space and setting of the environment is very important. When ensuring that all people are seated in a way that makes them all feel engaged and not isolated improves them being more active in participation. Additionally, doing different activities in different settings and ways enables all to understand and grasp concepts more." Participant from a W+G Club Training, May 2016

Conclusion

Mozilla has the experience rooted in network-building and a strong community presence to build an Inclusive web for Women and Girls. Convening a specialized hub with partners who are committed to the same goals and values is a key undertaking for the Mozilla Learning Network We can no longer afford to continue along a trajectory where systems and interfaces are built by a select few. We need an inclusive future that unequivocally values women's voices and expertise. Through understanding barriers that prevent women from accessing the internet to breaking the cycle that prevents them from succeeding online -- we must take charge, together, to ensure that women everywhere are web literate, leaders in technology while addressing gender equity and inclusion issues off and online.