

Female African coders 'on the front-line of the battle' to change gender power relations: UN chief

Young female African coders are “on the front-line” of the battle to change traditionally male power relations and bring about a more equitable balance between men and women, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said during his visit to Ethiopia to attend the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa.

The UN chief was speaking after meeting girls from across the continent taking part in the [African Girls Can Code Initiative](#), a joint initiative from the International Telecommunications Union ([ITU](#)) and [UN Women](#). This new programme saw more than 80 girls from 34 African countries join the first Coding Camp in Addis Ababa for 10 days in August 2018.

The girls attending the courses learn about digital literacy, coding and personal development skills, including enterprise know-how to ensure their financial security. They are trained as programmers, creators and designers, so that they are well equipped to compete for careers in areas such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and coding. The initiative will run until 2022 and is expected to reach more than 2,000 girls through 18 Coding Camps.

Mr. Guterres said that one of the fundamental problems in the world is that power is in the hands of men, leading to a male-dominated culture. In Africa, this is one of the reasons why it is so difficult for girls to go to school. In technology professions, the problem is particularly acute, with an overwhelming majority of men.

ITU [data](#) from 2017 shows that, as well as having the lowest rates of Internet penetration, the African region has the widest digital gender gap in the world: only 18.6 per cent of women use the Internet, compared with 24.9 per cent of men.

The UN chief recalled his time studying electrical engineering, when there was just one woman female in a class of 300: “This is what we need to change, and we are not yet there. We need more girls to take technology courses. This is absolutely crucial. If girls and women are not more involved in technology professions, power relations will remain very male dominated.”

Monday is the 2019 [International Day of Women and Girls in Science](#), which raises awareness of the fact that women and girls continue to be excluded from participating fully in science, importance of changing this trend: According to UN [data](#), only around 30 per cent of all female students select fields related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in higher education, and less than 30 per cent of researchers worldwide are women.