

## GIZ Genderwettbewerb 2024: One Health Data Alliance Africa

**Title:** Gender sensitivity and representation in Digital Health

**Project name:** One Health Data Alliance Africa (OHDAA)

**PN:** 21.2286.9

**Gender marker:** GG1

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### Background

The issues of gender are not only related to biological differences in people but expressions of power relations, roles and conformance/ non-conformance to socially constructed definitions of gender. The male-female classification of gender is still very widespread in several regions of the world especially in Africa and Asia and gender identification beyond male and female dichotomy may be considered illegal and punishable. Even when gender is taken as male-female dichotomy, it is easy to observe that even though women contribute substantially to the global economy and are integral for socioeconomic development, they continue to face gender-specific obstacles to self determination such as discrimination, limited access to health care and health technology, education, employment, and political participation. In the field of health, limited access of women to healthcare, limited focus on the development of health technology for women, limited access to health technologies and disparities in health workforce and leadership have contributed to the structural causes of inequality and exclusion of women.

The One Health Data Alliance Africa (OHDAA) project aligns the gender perspectives of Germany as well as the gender goals of the GIZ Africa department and project level goals with the statutory constructs and strategies of gender existing in the project countries and region to advance gender sensitive solutions in the field of health especially as it relates to health-related technologies.

### Promoting gender equality

Gender inequality is pronounced in access to healthcare and even more so in the adoption and utilization of health technology. OHDAA supports the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups in the development and scaling up of digital health technological solutions. For instance, the project starts with the support pan African development of **gender sensitive principles for the exchange of health information** across sectors and countries in Africa together with the African Union using a Technical Working Group of experts of both men and women from the continent. The document which was **endorsed** by the African Union in November 2023 and awaiting final review and publication contains how gender-disaggregated health data can be shared to support governments and health authorities to prevent the next wave of pandemic, monitor health and make informed data-based decisions. This approach has ensured advocacy and participation of women in the early stages of the conception, development and steering the direction of the document with regards to women. In the medium to long term, OHDAA will support the technical implementation of these principles on the continent and in different countries through support to existing technological platforms to better integrate gender-disaggregated health data across sectors and countries. In this way, we can make tailored interventions for specific sections of the population and not the current “*one size fits*” all approach to health interventions.

## Gender as a quality feature of our work

The OHDA project continues to support the role of women in digital health technology where they have often been discriminated. The project supports women leaders in technology related fields to drive conversations of One Digital Health. For instance, in October 2023 at the Africa Health Tech Summit, the project steered panel session on *One Health in the Digital Age*, where women leaders and professionals such as the Minister for Health in Rwanda, Director of African Union Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), One Health Team Lead for Africa CDC and female technology experts gave keynotes and participated as members of the discussion panel. Likewise in the implementation activities, OHDA prioritise qualified African female experts for the implementation of activities. For instance, in a study grant for the assessment of existing digital systems and data on the continent, the award was won by a local consulting technology organization that is run and managed by women. This ensures we are able to close the gap that exist between men and women in a field that is dominated by men and also improve the competitive chance of the women for future competitive tenders.

Our commitment to gender equality is commended by our implementation partner as it is an integral aspect of our work with them as espoused in the principles for health information exchange that was endorsed.

## Implementing feminist core principles

The BMZ's feminist development policy stipulates the use of Gender transformative approach to eliminate long standing power hierarchies. This involve addressing the root cause of such inequality and such as laws, practice and social norms. The OHDA project aligns with the **BMZ's feminist Action Area 1 "rights, resource and representation"** by ensuring that the issue of gender is considered at all levels of activities and implementation. The active participation of women contributes to the inclusion in policy dialogue and development and promotes dismantling of post-colonial and patriarchal structures and paving the pathway for more inclusive societies. The project also aligns with the **Action Area 2: Portfolio promotion of gender equality** in which the exchange of gender-disaggregated health data can be available for health monitoring, thereby dismantling the existing barriers to proper health care. This can support BMZ's portfolio development when the information about the realities of health of women and various sections of the population are available. The **Action Area 3: Building International Alliance** is particularly more pronounced in the OHDA project. The project has successfully engaged global and regional health institutions such as Quadripartite (WHO, FAO and WOA), Africa CDC, AU-IBAR, national ministries of Health etc. and promoting alliance for health. In these alliances, the role and participation women leaders have always been prioritized and promoted.

## Cooperation

The OHDA project actively cooperates internally within GIZ and externally with partners. For instance, at the Africa Health Tech summit 2023, OHDA supported the AU project Strengthening Crisis and Pandemic Response in Africa which organized a panel session that ended in the kick-off the flagship "**African Women in Digital Health**". The session elaborated the structural causes of discrimination against women in health on the continent and actions that need to be taken to ensure equality and participation of women in steering the the conversation about women's health. This form of collaboration has raised awareness for inclusion of women in health discussions especially relating to women, facilitate deliberations on the pathway for inclusive health and lead to the kickoff of a flagship for continuous conversations on women health.

## Contributions to internal gender mainstreaming: Corporate culture

Inclusion and diversity is internalized and an integral aspect of the OHDAA project. The team is diverse and represented in terms of different nationality, disability, religion and expertise brought to the team. OHDAA's activities and approach reflects not only the BMZ's approach to gender but also the 1730 group's approach to Gender transformation in which "**women as key change agents for sustainable development**" is emphasized. In an internal meeting for the 1730 group that focused on gender equality as the topic for the day in November 2023, OHDAA was the only project with equal gender representation (50% male/female classification). In September 2023, in the effort to support inclusion and identifying biases in recruitment, the OHDAA project supported the organization of a workshop on "Inclusive Hiring" for the 1730 group. The workshop shed some light on the unintended biases that could be perpetrated during hiring processes and how we could improve recruitment in the 1730 group as well as in GIZ in general for a more inclusive organization.

## Gender competence

The OHDAA project recognizes that there is gender-based discriminatory structure and ensures Gender Competence by actively participating in the Gender discourse in the 1730 group and supporting the realization of the group's gender goals. Challenges to achieving gender goals include different gender strategies and approaches between organizational Gender approach and actual gender strategy in project countries. The Africa group of GIZ are currently embarking on the development of a harmonized **Gender Strategy for Africa** that consider these differences.

## Cooperation

OHDAA collaborate with colleagues and projects such as PPOH and Pro PaSSaR (Cameroun), MGHP (Malawi), SCIIDA II (IGAD), DTC (Rwanda) and SCPRA (African Union) as well as external institutions, government ministries, academia etc. to ensure that gender rights are advanced and integrated in our activities and structure. Some of the challenges relates to changing the existing status quo and structures of discrimination, marginalization of women in health especially digital health, unequal representation of women in key strategic institutions and positions. OHDAA is supporting the intensification of efforts to achieve success in key areas like awareness building for the promotion of women rights and inclusion and concreted efforts by all to drive actions and drive to action. In the short term, awareness has been created and in the medium to long term, such conversations will be deepened and translated into tangible implementation.

## Conclusion

BMZ and GIZ has always reiterated their commitment to advancing inclusion and equality for all persons. The OHDAA project supports, aligns and advance these commitments by translating the policies and strategies into actionable activities. While the project can only concretely report on the gender milestones after the project life cycle, it has already engaged in important activities that promote gender equality and women participation especially in digital health.