Since 2021, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Global Programme on Cybercrime, through its Africa Women in Cyber (AWIC) Networking group has been committed to empowering women in cyber-related fields in Africa. Through tailored coaching workshops, UNODC has been able to provide the network's members with skills to help them grow in their careers. In 2024, following a survey completed by members of the network, particular focus was placed on strengthening the communication skills of the members, recognizing that effective communication is crucial for career advancement.
Communication skills are fundamental in any professional setting, but they hold particular importance in the cyber sector. This field often requires collaboration across diverse teams, clear articulation of complex technical concepts, and the ability to influence stakeholders. Effective communication can lead to better teamwork, more efficient problem-solving, and enhanced leadership capabilities, all of which are essential for career success.

AWIC’s initiative to bolster communication skills involves a comprehensive approach, including intensive sessions on 4 main topics:

- How to influence to advance in your career
- Assertive Communication
- Fundamental of Interpersonal Communication
- Building Sisterhood

These themes were selected to equip members with the tools they need to communicate their ideas confidently and persuasively.

The emphasis on communication skills not only helps AWIC members to enhance their current job performance but also prepares them for leadership roles. In a field where clarity and precision are paramount, the ability to communicate effectively can set candidates apart in job interviews, promotions, and professional networking.

By focusing on these skills, UNODC through AWIC is not only empowering African women to succeed in their careers but also contributing to a more inclusive and dynamic cyber industry on the continent. As more women rise to leadership positions, they bring diverse perspectives and innovative solutions to the forefront, driving progress and security in the cyber realm. This underscores the vital role that effective communication plays in career success, particularly in the cyber sector, and is paving the way for more women to thrive in this critical field.

REFLECTIONS AND RESILIENCE: AFTER THE AFRICAN WOMEN IN CYBER SUMMIT
Nne Ikoiwak - Cybersecurity Professional and Policy Advocate (Nigeria)

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a warm glow over Nairobi, Kenya, I found myself surrounded by a sisterhood of remarkable African women. It was October, and the 2023 UNODC African Women in Cyber Summit was in full swing. The air buzzed with anticipation, and I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness. In that moment, I sensed an indelible force about to shape my life.

The UNODC Africa Women in Cyber Network had extended its support to members of our Cybercrimes Unit, inviting us to attend this liberating event. From the first day of the summit, as I stepped into the conference hall, I was greeted by passionate organizers and fellow panelists.

I had been invited to this summit to also participate as a panelist, and I viewed this as a great opportunity to share my insights and knowledge in the fight against Cybercrimes. But, more importantly, it allowed me to learn from women who are leading the charge in various facets of the
cyber world.

In one session, we delved into the complexities of transnational crimes. We dissected case studies, shared insights, and debated strategies. The room crackled with energy as we explored the nuances of cyber threats that transcended borders. It was a reminder that our work had global implications, and collaboration was key.

The mentorship session was equally transformative. Seasoned professionals generously shared their experiences, offering guidance and encouragement. There was a lot of self-truths and vulnerable conversations. Bonds formed effortlessly, women lifting each other up, bridging gaps, and challenging stereotypes. Then the as the summit progressed towards the end, we gathered and pledged to dream beyond the stars, to chase our aspirations relentlessly.

And so, the months unfolded. We collaborated, supported each other. Our monthly cyber cafe became a sanctuary, a place to learn from masters, exchange ideas, and celebrate victories. I discovered the power of this network, the way it fueled growth, shattered limitations, and ignited courage.

Personally, I dared to write. The blank pages no longer intimidate me; it beckons with promise. I pen articles, share my insights, and I have found my voice. Continuous learning, once a struggle, has now became a habit. I revel in the camaraderie of cyber sisters who cheer me on, even when doubt whispers in my ear.

As time goes by, I reflect. I am not exactly where I want to be, but the steps I have taken are significant. The road ahead shimmers with possibility. Dreams, once distant, are now within reach. And so, I write, beautifully, passionately because this sisterhood taught me that resilience is not just surviving; it's thriving.

To my fellow cyber warriors, wherever you are: Keep dreaming, keep climbing. Our reality awaits, one minute at a time.
Digital finance is considered a catalyst for poverty reduction, as it provides low-income households with access to affordable and convenient tools to support their economic activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the gender gap in digital and financial literacy widened and has put women at even greater risk, especially in developing countries like Cameroon. The pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of the world, leading to an increase in digital fraud and forcing women to use digital financial services even when their digital and financial skills are weak.

In Cameroon, the African Women in Tech Startup (AfricanWITS) association is working to reduce this digital gender divide. AfricanWITS was created in 2016 with a mission to promote information and communication technologies (ICT) for women and young girls and to boost female and young technology entrepreneurship. The association implements its mission via 4 main poles:

- A Feminine Tech Hub;
- An incubator specializing in technological entrepreneurship and innovative services for women, young people, and for the development of community projects in the field of ICTs and empowerment;
- An Academy for the training and mentoring of women and young girls;
- An advisory and advocacy body to support international policies and institutions in the implementation of development programs and plans to reduce the technology gender gap in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The African Women in Tech Startup (AfricanWITS) estimates that in Cameroon, women in rural areas, women entrepreneurs in the informal sector, and women who are poorly educated and have low digital and financial literacy, are more vulnerable to cybercrimes in Cameroon.

These crimes include social engineering scams, identity theft, breaches of trust involving secret information like mobile money account passwords, and harassment through the disclosure of private information, often related to phone theft.

Since its creation in 2016, the African Women in Tech Startup (AfricanWITS) has supported over 3000 women in Cameroon. It provides financial education training by using local fintech solutions. It also provides E-commerce training programs and offers free prepaid cards in partnership with local banks to facilitate access to digital financial services, including online payments. It also supports women in rural areas with digital financial literacy workshops, with a focus on local fintech solutions and digital banking services.
Independent studies continue to demonstrate that holding a globally recognized IT certification enhances professional mobility, recognition of competency, job advancement and earning potential. It signifies to employers and peers that you are dedicated to high professional standards, knowledge and skills. It also closes the gap between the foundation provided by formal academic study and the technical and management competencies required to thrive in the modern professional and business environment.

Investing in IT certifications is a considerable cost and, depending on the certification, the total bill can land over US$1,000 including review classes, study guides and exam costs. This is a significant cost for most candidates and contributes to the lack of diversity and barriers of entry we see in the industry. With the rising cost of living across the world, here are five ways you can resource your IT certifications budget.

Self-funding: You may have to start with dipping into personal funds at first. Once you have identified the exam to go for, create a budget and savings plan to cover the costs of purchasing all necessary materials to prepare, including an accredited training review class, study guides and exam vouchers.

Read the full article [here](#)
demand for security professionals is high, and the field offers a sense of purpose by safeguarding sensitive data and information systems.

Let me take you on a journey, a tale of a small-town girl who dared to dream. Pushed into university, she found herself studying cybersecurity, amidst a sea of giants, only the second female in her class. The echoes of doubt sometimes grew deafening, but she held firm to her aspirations.

Year after year, she demonstrated unwavering perseverance—year one, year two, year three—each a testament to her determination. In her fourth year, faced with choosing a specialization, she boldly pursued database technologies as her minor. Despite challenges, she prevailed while many of her peers succumbed to pressure. Undeterred, she pursued her dream of earning a master’s in project planning.

Today, she thrives in the cybersecurity space, a testament to her resilience and determination. But her story doesn’t end there. She’s an active member the UNODC AWIC network, finding fulfillment in giving back. Locally, she volunteers at ISACA, where she’s not just a member but a leader. Leading the WiSTEM group for KYWN KUPES Young Women’s Network is a role she cherishes, proud to contribute to a cause she believes in deeply.

She’s also part of WiTN – Women in Technology, where she’s currently a mentee in cohort 3, learning and growing under the guidance of experienced mentors. Her journey is a testament to the power of perseverance and the importance of mentorship. In her eyes, life’s twists and turns are divinely orchestrated, each challenge shaping her to stand tall on the shoulders of giants. For her, the mantra is clear: "Mentored to mentor." It's a belief she holds dear, a philosophy that drives her forward, inspiring others to dare to dream, just as she did.

Women bring a diverse set of skills to cybersecurity—leadership, communication, analytical prowess—all vital for identifying and addressing risks. Embrace this journey, leverage your unique abilities, and capitalize on empowering platforms like SheLeads, WiCYS, UNODC, WiTN, and ITU.

We bring a diverse set of skills to cybersecurity, boasting strengths in leadership, interpersonal communication, analytical prowess, and personal qualities. These skills are invaluable in identifying and addressing cybersecurity risks. Embrace the journey and leverage your unique abilities. In this dynamic field, the world is your oyster. Dare to dream and let your aspirations soar in the realm of cybersecurity.
AI AND WOMEN IN AFRICA
By Adediji Bisola - Cybersecurity Analyst (Nigeria)

The increased adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) promises a new era of innovation and progress but casts a stark light on persistent gender disparities. The promise of AI to revolutionise healthcare, education, and countless other aspects of life is undeniable. However, as a woman, I am keenly aware of the unique gender-specific threats the technology presents and how it can further amplify existing ones. In Africa, where the digital divide and societal inequalities often intersect, the impact of AI on women's lives is particularly nuanced. AI is not inherently intelligent; the technology is an aggregation of data (produced by humans), collected over time from different sources combined with human-created algorithms to produce output. In addition to the bias present datasets, African women are somewhat invincible as many data collection procedures overlook populations and activities that do not tick traditional boxes and can lead to data blindness. As a result, AI-powered technology carries the risk of amplifying existing biases and vulnerabilities targeting women due to inaccuracies.

This lack of representation raises critical questions about who is shaping the future of AI in Africa and whether the technology will genuinely address the needs and challenges faced by women. As AI increasingly permeates critical sectors like healthcare, finance, and governance, its impact on women's lives will only intensify. With limited access to resources, legal protections, and digital literacy training, African women are uniquely vulnerable to the potential harms of AI, while simultaneously poised to benefit significantly from its potential for empowerment. The Promise of AI for Women's Safety in Africa The adoption of AI-powered cybersecurity solutions specifically targeted towards women in Africa is still in its early stages, but several promising initiatives and tools are emerging. The rAIInbow chatbot in South Africa provides confidential support to survivors of gender-based violence.

Developed as part of the World Justice Project's efforts, rAIInbow offers a safe and confidential space for women experiencing domestic abuse to seek information, support, and resources. By leveraging natural language processing and machine learning, rAIInbow can understand and respond to users' queries compassionately and empathetically, offering guidance on safety planning, legal options, and counselling services. While this is just a starting point, it demonstrates the potential of AI to create safer and more secure online spaces for women in Africa.

Additionally, international organisations are recognising the potential of AI to address gender bias. The UNODC Global Judicial Integrity Network at the AI for
If Africa is to fully harness AI’s potential, a gender approach to development, implementation and legislation is necessary. Robust data protection laws are essential, bridging the gap between rapid technological advancement and lagging legislation to safeguard women's privacy and data rights. Investing in digital literacy programs for women is paramount, ensuring they are active participants in the AI revolution, not just passive recipients.

**UNODC THROUGH ITS AWIC NETWORK LAUNCHES THE SHELEADS PROGRAM**

In April, UNODC through the Africa Women in Cyber (AWIC) networking group launched the ‘SheLeads Program’. The unique program aims to empower interested AWIC members already in leadership roles within the group, to enhance their managerial and leadership skills. 67 people applied and 32 members were selected. Since April, they have participated in tailored sessions designed particularly for their needs.

The SheLeads program offers a series of two-hour group coaching sessions, facilitated by experienced coaches, where participants have the opportunity to delve into key concepts, engage in enriching discussions, and practice essential skills alongside their peers. Through these sessions, the participants explore various aspects of leadership, management, and personal development, equipping them with valuable tools and approaches to excel in their roles.

**Upcoming events**

- **SheLeads Program** - 13 September 2024
- **Cyber Diva Bootcamp** - 25 September 2024