



28 February 2017

Gender and Technology

To the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 32/13

Tearfund

SGBV prevention and Response Team/Incubation Hub

Website: www.tearfund.org/sexualviolence

Twitter: @Tearfund

Contact email: Prabu.deepan@tearfund.org

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development organization based in the UK. It works in over 50 countries focusing on various issues from humanitarian response, SGBV prevention and response, child health, women's health, HIV, and creating local changes through faith networks.

Tearfund is committed to ensuring that every aspect of our work is sensitive to gender, and encourages churches worldwide to support and advocate for the equal worth of men and women. Our SGBV response is rolled out in 11 countries in Africa, South East Asia, Middle-east and Latin America regions focus on the following areas:

- Leaders will be mobilised and equipped to speak out and act.
- Faith communities will become safe spaces.
- Men and boys will become key advocates for gender justice.
- Sexual violence will be integrated proactively into humanitarian response.
- Survivor movements will shape policy and practice.
- A strong faith response will be built to prevent and end Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage in three countries.

Summary of work related to mobile or digital technology:

The use of mobile phone technology to promote HIV prevention, Family Planning update and SRH information and access outcomes in Nigeria, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Questionnaire

For the preparation of this report, OHCHR would appreciate receiving information in response to the following questions:

The meaning of the digital divide/extent of the problem

1. Please identify the main obstacles and barriers faced by women and girls to access digital technologies and participate in digital life. Please elaborate on the nature of these obstacles and how they manifest themselves in practice (e.g. political, economic, social and legal factors, cultural and religious norms, education and literacy gaps, online violence, bullying and harassment, infrastructural constraints, security, affordability, lack of relevant content).

Social and gender norms that prevent/limit/control women's autonomy in their day to day lives, create and sustain economic barriers, limit access to information, education and also shape laws and policies rooted in patriarchal values that do not benefit women and girls are the main barriers and obstacles faced by women and girls in accessing and

participating in digital life. These barriers extend themselves to every aspect women's lives, both offline and online. Our understanding is that faith plays an important role in people's lives, in shaping and influencing behaviour and norms, especially also in how gender norms are reinforced through the interpretation of scriptures and how it is applied within societies, and most often in challenging ways as they are applied and interpreted to support practices and norms that have a negative impact on the lives of men and women in relation to gender equality, sexual and gender-based violence.

2. Does your company/organization consider the impact of its digital products, services, strategies and policies on women and girls?

No, we do not directly work on this, however we do have programs addressing maternal health/sexual-reproductive health that promotes the use of technology among women, therefore involves improving digital literacy of women, creating online spaces for women to communicate with their peers etc.

3. Please indicate if your company/organization collects sex and gender disaggregated data regarding access, use and impact of digital technologies. Is this data openly published and accessible (in accordance with responsible data practices)? If possible, please provide such statistics.

Not at the moment.

4. Please indicate if your company/organization has set measurable targets for gender equality in access and use of digital technologies and describe those targets and their effect.

No, our targets are broadly on gender equality in all aspects of life, but don't include indicators on access to and/or the use of digital technologies.

5. How does your company/organization address the needs of diverse members of the female population in terms of accessing and participating in digital technologies, including women and girls belonging to ethnic or linguistic minorities, those living in extreme poverty or of low caste, those living in rural or marginalized urban areas, women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, transgender and intersex persons, elderly women etc.? What can companies/organizations do to ensure access to alternative communications mechanisms for those unable or unwilling to participate in digital technologies?

We currently do not have specific programs with the aim of improving access/participation to digital technologies, but like mentioned above our program HIV, FP and SRH programming in DRC, Nigeria and Malawi use mobile technology to promote access to information and services and mobile platform for sharing information, safe spaces for women and girls.

Our partners IMW World Health also have a program that promotes gender equality, especially women's empowerment, and use technology as an approach to achieve this, and in doing so promoting digital literacy. More details here: <https://imaworldhealth.org/girl-rising-is-now-showing-in-four-provinces-in-dr-congo/>

Organisations/companies need to find the relevant entry points that work for each of these communities, in the specific contexts. Women aren't a homogenous group, their needs, experiences, challenges, contexts, aspirations and status are diverse, also "women" aren't synonymous with vulnerable. We need to change our narrative to acknowledge the resilience of women, the traditions of women, and matriarchs in most indigenous society to

then explore entry points into building access and participation in digital technology that will add value and meaning to their lives as defined by them.

Entry points are key, and using a public health framework in most instances work well, and using public health as an entry point to introduce digital technologies can work well in most communities (like explained above about our HIV/Maternal Health/SRH programming using technologies). When the popular narrative is “technology is bad” in most “traditional” contexts, we need to use alternatives to help people understand how technology can add value and meaning to their social, economic, political spaces, and also to their cultural heritage and traditions.

Human Rights implications of the gender digital divide for women and girls

6. What is your company/organization doing to ensure that its interventions to bridge the gender digital divide, are based upon, and fully consistent with international human rights, including gender equality? Does it conduct impact assessments and/or consult with civil society, affected communities, and human rights experts? (You may wish to consider some key principles required to adopt a human rights-based approach *viz.*: accountability, equality and non-discrimination, participation, transparency, empowerment, sustainability, etc.).¹
Not at the moment, but this is something we are very seriously looking at for our organisation’s 10 year strategy.

7. How does your company/organization encourage the development and use of digital technologies as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls? How does it support the creation of online content, applications and services that reflect women’s needs and/or promote their rights? Does it support women’s rights organizations, women human rights defenders and women environmental activists to use these technologies (for example to access critical information, build knowledge, express thoughts and beliefs, form networks and communities and mobilise for change)? Please provide any relevant examples.
Nothing at this moment, but like mentioned about we are (like most organisations) just coming to the phase of digital literacy as a critical element of our programming from the let’s use digital platforms as only communication tools, so I’m really hopeful this will be an exciting space for us to explore how to merge our values and principles into our digital strategy.

8. Does your company/organization take into account the gender and ICT targets contained in the UN Sustainable Development Goals?² Please elaborate.
Just started refreshing of our strategy.

9. Are you aware of any laws, policies or practices to address technology-related or technology-mediated violence against women and girls (e.g. cyber bullying, hate speech, stalking, sexual harassment, trafficking, manipulation of personal information and images)? Has your company/organization taken any specific actions to protect against, and respond to

¹ Other human rights considerations that could/should be taken into consideration include freedoms of expression,

² For example, Goal 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; Goal 9.c Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

violence experienced by women and girls via technology platforms (e.g. policies, monitoring of content, providing mechanisms for reporting and redress)?

Just the UK government's cyber crime strategies, but this is not gendered or nor does it account for the specific nature of violence against women and girls in the digital space.

10. Does your company/organization facilitate access to remedy in accordance with human rights principles and standards, where human rights harms may be caused or contributed to by connectivity initiatives (e.g. where an individual is threatened by internet-based content, or by illegitimate surveillance, limitations on freedoms of expressions, and other rights)?³

Not at the moment.

11. Has your company/organization considered how Big Data, the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Ambient Intelligence may impact on the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective? Do you see a risk that women and girls may be discriminated against, or excluded by these technologies? Or are they likely to create new opportunities to promote gender equality and empowerment? How can companies/organizations influence design and standards to ensure these technologies are inclusive?

We are still in the process of refreshing our digital strategy, and our hope is that we will work towards outcomes listed above.

Possible solutions for bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective

12. Is your company/organization taking measures to expand equal access and enhance the participation of women and girls in digital technologies as users, content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders? Please elaborate on any initiatives, programs or other interventions you may be leading or supporting (including to address underlying causes of the gender digital divide).

Yes, definitely as users and content creators within the organisations across our communication, media, and ICT departments.

13. Does your company/organization engage in public advocacy or participate in the Internet Governance Forum to promote gender-responsive policies on digital technologies? Do you support processes and mechanisms that enable the full, active and equal participation of women and girls in decision-making about how the Internet is shaped and governed?

We have not engaged in public advocacy on this, but we fully support the participation of women and girls in decision-making at all spheres of life, including how the Internet is shaped and governed as this again has implications for their lives.

14. How can the industry and tech community be productively engaged in bridging the gender digital divide and improving the lived experience of women and girls online? What should be the responsibilities of different stakeholders to make digital inclusion a reality and ensure meaningful digital opportunities for all?

Tech industries and corporations have to take gender equality and violence against women and girls seriously. Online violence on women and girls has increased drastically, and Internet is not a safe space for women and girls, and is increasingly becoming very toxic. Violence against women and girls is rapidly shifting and also extending to online spaces

³ See UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Principles 29 - 31.

and using digital technologies, and therefore it is an undeniable responsibility of tech corporates to ensure safe access and participation of women and girls to digital spaces. Tech industries have to address their gender policies in their organisations, and if this is meaningfully addressed, then the digital spaces they create/develop will reflect this because of the involvement, leadership and participation of women in co-creating these spaces. That said, all stakeholders are responsible for making digital inclusion a reality. Tearfund and other faith-based organizations should make strides to ensure digital opportunities are woven into programs addressing gender. And our aim is to work towards this goal within our organisation and in the spaces we have input and influence within the SGBV framework.