



Theodora Anavhe Adamu Foundation (TAAF)

Technology -Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) Policy

Background

Digital inclusion is not possible without digital safety. That is, benefiting from digital products is not possible without ensuring the safety and security of users. The prevalence of the internet and digital products has presented a tremendous opportunity to create, build, and regulate a more equal future for women and girls. Digital life provides vital spaces for women seeking expression and opportunity including access to basic education and services and yet it is simultaneously a vector for perpetrators and abusers (individuals, groups and collectives) targeting women and adolescent girls because of their gender. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) comprises a spectrum of behaviors, including stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech, exploitation, and is associated with mis and disinformation and violent extremism, which are perpetrated online or using technology. TFGBV not only reflects and further entrenches inequalities in the online world, it also increasingly interacts with and influences the offline world. Despite often being perceived as a less serious and less harmful form of GBV, TFGBV can have serious consequences on the health, life opportunities and right to expression of women and girls and increasingly manifests in and is a feature of offline gender-based violence.

Definition and Context

TFGBV as “an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender.” At scale, this also means that women, girls, and other minority and marginalized communities can be targeted as groups. This inclusive definition

requires us to defend and ensure the rights of women and girls, and other vulnerable/marginalized groups all spaces, physical and otherwise, including both digital and analog spaces where technology products are now commonplace. The repetitive nature of TFGBV means that most women experience multiple types of abuse.

TFGBV is a systemic problem which restricts women and girls' right to expression and ability to freely enjoy digital spaces and products. The prevalence of personally experiencing online violence against women globally is at a staggering 38 per cent, according to The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)¹—that's nearly 2 out of every 5 women. EIU also reported that 85 per cent of women and girls on the internet have witnessed online violence being committed against other women. These numbers are even higher among young women and girls: a study conducted by Plan International in 31 countries found that 58% of young women and girls aged 15–25 years had experienced online harassment - that's nearly 3 out of every 5

young women. Further, women who experience intersecting forms of discrimination are at a greater risk of being harassed, a study showing that women of color using Twitter are 34 per cent more likely to be mentioned in an abusive tweet. Individual users and professionals alike who utilize official complaint pathways to report online violence social media companies may receive no response or slow responses, demonstrating a need for social media platforms to be better equipped to protect the rights of women and girl users. In short, the rights of women and girls to express themselves are not ensured in online spaces without additional effort.

No matter the form it takes, TFGBV can have a devastating impact on women and girls by restricting their right to freedom of expression. As a result, we are deprived of their participation as equal subjects in public life and civic spaces as well as their role as elected officials and public figures shaping democratic societies. Girls and young women surveyed by Plan International and subjected to frequent online violence reported that 19% started self-censoring and decreased posting about contentious topics and 12% stopped using social media in full. ² This pattern is repeated in women journalists: 3%% of women journalists in a global survey responded to online violence by self-censoring their journalism on social media, while 2%% reported withdrawing from all online interaction.

TAAF's Commitments

- Ensure women, girls and other marginalized/vulnerable groups including women and girls with disabilities are included throughout our product development, deployment and maintenance processes, with particular attention to ideation and design stages, to proactively understand and mitigate end user realities.

- Ensure that data privacy and security begins from the perspective of TFGBV survivors and is achieved through robust end user controls, safety-by-design, and corporate and government encryption of data in transit (end to end encryption between devices) and at rest (while being stored).
- Ensure our legal frameworks for accountability are constructed and implemented to hold offenders of TFGBV accountable for the experiences of women, girls, and other marginalized communities in places where we work.

Therefore, by means of this policy, TAAF will note the following core principles and actions that should be taken to allow us to collectively achieve gender equity in digital technologies:

1. Safety by Design: Ensuring survivor-centered product financing, ideation, development and deployment:

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- Development and application of technologies and digital platforms must be in partnership and with the participation of women and other vulnerable/marginalized communities in all their diversity as well as organizations, frontline providers and advocates, to ensure relevant and accessible safety features and complaint mechanisms.
 - Safety must be considered from inception and directly incorporated at the design stage. This includes a set of principles which outline measures that providers can use to safeguard users from online risks and harms.

2. Privacy by Default and Design: Ensuring robust data privacy and security to proactively mitigate use of data for TFGBV

TAAF will work with Governments and business and technology to advance, regulate, and standardize data collection practices, privacy, and security. Data collected and stored can be weaponized to commit and amplify TFGBV including intimate partner violence, cyberstalking, sharing of intimate images without consent, doxxing and impersonation. While data is highly valuable and essential to the business model of TAAF, collection of personal data should be only for certain cases when consent has been provided and there is a primary functional user driven reason.

TAAF data collection and data use for women-centered digital solutions will adhere to ten data principles. These principles should not be limited to personal data and must be applied to all data that is collected

on women and girls. The data principles, which complement safety by design approaches, include: purpose limitation, data minimization, proper use of data, fairness and ownership, informed consent and transparency, accuracy and data quality, security: integrity, confidentiality and availability, accountability, and unconditional service.³

While the interaction of women and girls with technology will and should continue to increase, data protection and privacy should be a priority in ensuring women and girls are not further exposed to harmful actors who mine personal data for malicious actions. Anchoring data collection in safe and ethical principles as well as human rights-based approaches is central to ensure that efforts are made to address the gap on gender-equity in digital solutions and women-centric design solutions.

3. Effective Regulation: Implementation of law and policy to enforce accountability

TAAF will develop its law and policies must through consultative processes with women's groups and organizations as well as business and technology companies to ensure that it is effective, mitigate unintended consequences and will not do harm. The specific harms caused by TFGBV must have specific regulatory responses and accountability mechanisms. Further, regulation must comprise both selfregulation, industry standards as well as laws to ensure that survivor-centered approaches can be

enforced. Moreover, do no harm approaches to capture unintended consequences, including the weaponizing of laws against women's voices and ensuring that the right to freedom of expression is not abused, is critical.

To prevent TFGBV in all its works, TAAF will :

1. Hold perpetrators accountable: Implement a framework for holding individuals accountable for using workplace resources or the digital environment to perpetrate TFGBV.
2. Promote digital inclusion and create an environment where digital safety is recognized as a prerequisite for digital inclusion and equal opportunity for all employees.
3. Provide training and awareness programs by educating all staff, especially front-line workers and managers, about TFGBV, its manifestations, it's link to offline violence, and how to recognize and respond to it.
4. Foster digital literacy by equipping all staff with the knowledge and tools to promote non-violent norms and understand the risks associated with digital platforms
5. Offer psychosocial and legal support by providing access to resources for victims of TFGBV.
6. Create a culture of belief and support by encouraging a workplace where victims are believed, supported, and provided with a safe space to report incidents without fear of reprisal.

7. Encourage active bystander intervention by empowering all employees to speak up and take a stand against TFGBV when they witness it, thereby fostering workplace collective responsibility.

This is a call for action: In order to ensure respect, protection and promotion of women's human rights in the digital age, it is essential to address the way in which the design, adoption and proliferation of technologies intersect with existing gender inequalities. Gender equality and women's human rights will require integrated digital safety and security to protect privacy and prevent technology-facilitated genderbased violence. This is a course that TAAF is committed to.