USAID's Collective Action to Reduce Gender-Based Violence (CARE-GBV)

Foundational Elements for Gender-Based Violence Programming in Development

SECTION 3.5. SECTOR-SPECIFIC PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Addressing GBV through Technology Programs

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial intelligence
CARE-GBV	Collective Action to Reduce Gender-Based Violence
GBV	Gender-based violence
ICT	Information and communication technology
ODK	OpenDataKit
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TFGBV	Technology-facilitated gender-based violence
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTN	Women in Tek Network

Introduction

This brief describes why USAID's technology programs should address gender-based violence (GBV) and details specific strategies for doing so. Program examples are provided to illustrate how the strategies can be incorporated into technology programs. Links to tools and resources are provided for additional information.

This brief is part of the *Foundational Elements for Gender-Based Violence Programming in Development*, which include core principles, program elements (prevention, risk mitigation, response, enabling environment), and process elements. Ideally, readers will familiarize themselves with these sections of the *Foundational Elements* before reading this brief. At a minimum, readers should be familiar with the following sections before reviewing this brief:

- Section 1.0. Introduction

- Section 3.2. Program Elements: Risk Mitigation

- Section 4.0. Process Elements:

    - Values, Organizational Culture, and Leadership (Program Example: A Framework for Safeguarding Program Participants)

    - Strategic Planning and Design (Gender Analysis and Referral Network Mapping)
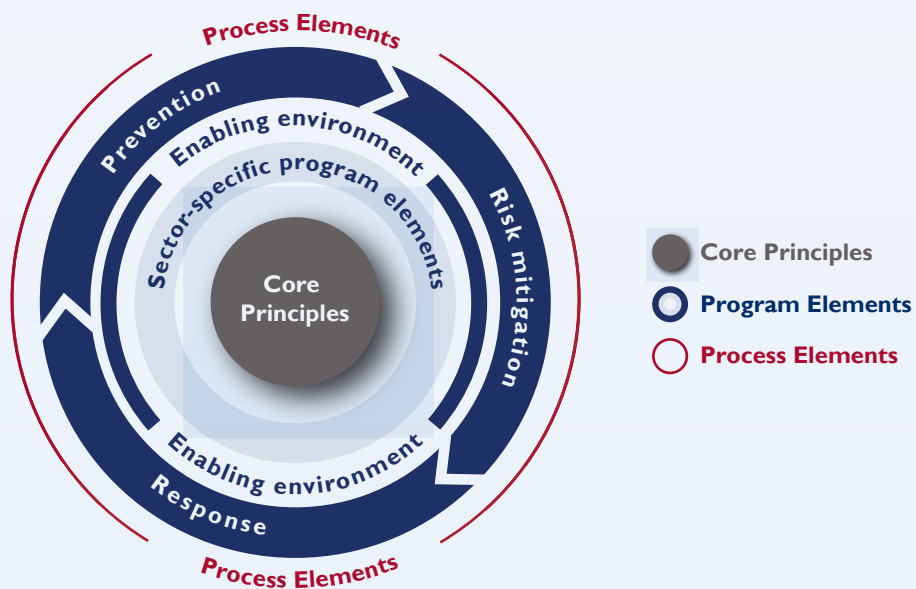
The strategies described in this brief are organized by levels of the socio-ecological model: individual, interpersonal, community, and structural. Effective GBV interventions typically include strategies that address multiple levels of the socio-ecological model.

Structural

Community

Interpersonal

Individual

Structural

Community

Interpersonal

Individual
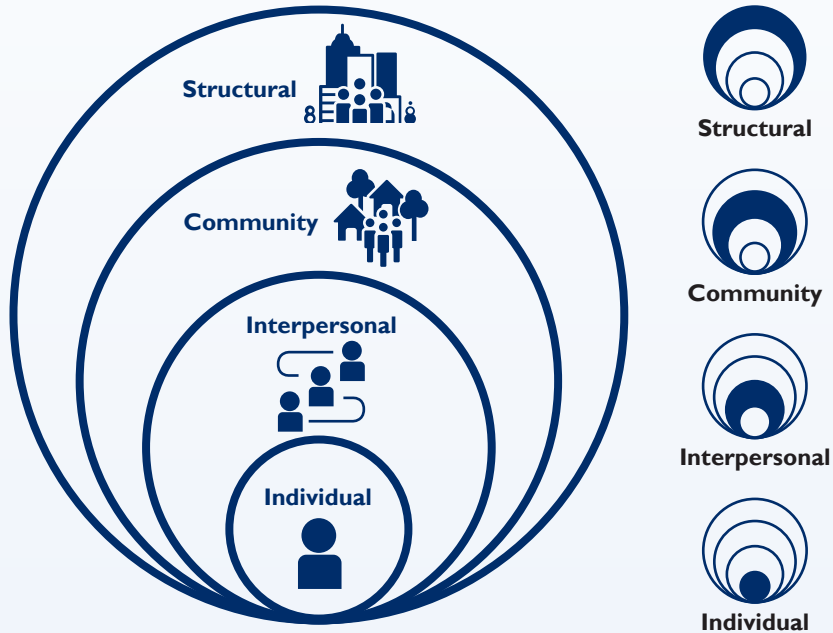
Each strategy is also labeled as prevention, risk mitigation, response, or enabling environment.

Prevention

Enabling environment

Risk mitigation

Enabling environment

Response

Prevention

Risk mitigation

Response

Enabling environment
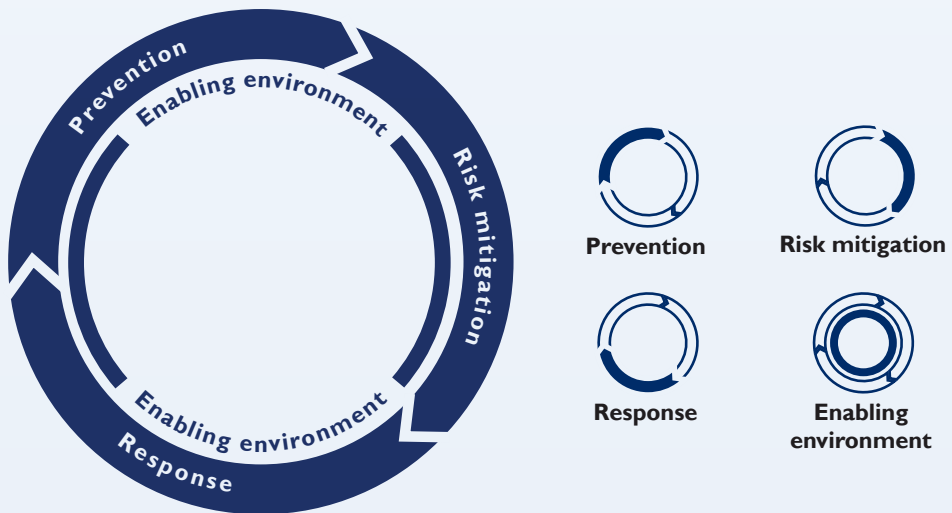
Why the Technology Sector Should Address GBV

The digital revolution is rapidly transforming how economies, governments, and people interact and engage (USAID n.d. a). Digital technology is an increasingly essential tool for development, with tremendous potential to accelerate sustainable development, gender equality, and efforts to address GBV (UN Women 2021, Harris et al. 2020). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are being harnessed to prevent and respond to GBV. More than 1.5 billion women now own a mobile phone in low- and middle-income countries, and more than a billion use mobile Internet; thus, women and girls, including survivors of GBV, have unprecedented access to information and platforms to seek assistance and support from professionals and peers (GSMA 2019). Those at risk of GBV are using online and smartphone-based applications to feel safer in public and domestic spaces, and GBV and women's rights advocates are using online tools to campaign, lobby, and mobilize for gender equality and action on GBV (GBV Area of Responsibility 2019). The global #MeToo movement, Latin America's #NiUnaMenos, and India's #IWillGoOut are powerful examples of how technology is being harnessed to catalyze attention to GBV.

Digital technologies are showing great potential in efforts to address GBV, violence, abuse, harassment, and exploitation of women, girls, and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). At the same time, GBV is emerging as a significant problem in the digital sphere, with negative implications for women's and girls' digital safety, access, and inclusion (Fascendini and Fialová 2011). GBV perpetrated using digital tools and platforms is part of the continuum of interrelated forms of GBV that occur throughout women's lives (Association for Progressive Communications 2017). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is rooted in and reinforces the same gender inequalities, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination that underpin other types of GBV (Dunn 2020). USAID's *Digital Strategy* recognizes the role of digital technology in increasing risk of GBV (USAID n.d. a).

TFGBV: ICTs are used to perpetrate intimate partner and sexual violence. Examples include, but are not limited to, the use of ICTs to sexually harass, groom, and exploit women, and to commit image-based abuse. In some settings, image-based abuse has been linked to honor crimes, including honor killing. ICTs have been linked to physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse in intimate relationships. An act as simple as sending and receiving text messages can trigger violence against a woman from an abusive partner.

These and other forms of TFGBV are a growing problem, and the potential for abuse increases as technology becomes more advanced (see Box 1 for more information) (United Nations General Assembly 2018, EQUALS 2019). Online and offline, GBV contributes to the gender digital divide. One reason is that families prevent women and girls from accessing technology due to fears for their online safety. Abusive partners prevent women from accessing technology as a strategy of control. Additionally, risk of TFGBV can force women and girls to withdraw from online engagement,

[1] The term 'women and girls' is inclusive of women in all their diversity.

platforms, and services, or restrict and censor their participation in digital spaces due to concerns they will be targeted with threats, intimidation, stalking, and abuse. This undermines the potential benefits of digital transformation for women and girls (GSMA Connected Women 2018, Hobbis 2018, Linabary and Milano 2021). Poorly designed digital programming can expose women and girls to higher levels of GBV, adding to the burden GBV places on individuals, families, and economies (Crabtree and Geara 2018). For example, smartphone applications or websites that do not have safe exit buttons can place survivors at risk if a perpetrator is monitoring their technology.[2] Addressing TFGBV is critical to promote human rights and equitable digital access, inclusion, and participation for women, girls, and people of diverse SOGIESC.

GBV in digital programming and the technology sector: GBV and harmful gender norms, biases, and sexism within the male-dominated technology sector are a problem. GBV contributes to a lack of diverse perspectives and voices in digital leadership, policy, and decision-making, and in digital product and service design (EQUALS 2019). Civil society and gender experts are absent from many of the influential processes that shape the future of technology. The lack of women's representation, participation, and influence within the technology sector is linked to embedded gender bias in hardware and software design, including artificial intelligence (AI) (West et al. 2019, Dharmapuri and Shoemake 2021). These issues risk further entrenching gender inequality and violence, abuse, and harassment of women, girls, and people of diverse SOGIESC, both in digital spaces and offline.

Digital and other ICTs are becoming increasingly ubiquitous and essential for the achievement of sustainable development. Safe and inclusive access to these technologies is, therefore, important for women's social and political participation. It is also critical to enable their access

Box 1: Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)

TFGBV, also called online violence, cyber violence, and digital violence, includes "any act of GBV that is committed, assisted, or aggravated in part or fully by use of information and community technology (ICT) such as mobile phones and smartphones, the internet, social media platforms, or email" (United Nations General Assembly 2018). It, therefore, includes online and offline violence when technology has played a role. Like GBV more broadly, TFGBV overwhelmingly skews toward women and girls, with most aggressive behavior, harassment, abusive language, and denigrating images in online spaces aimed at women and girls. However, intersectional identities such as gender identity, sexual orientation, class, disability, caste, race, indigenous identity, and language minority also play a major role.

TFGBV is widespread and includes a range of behaviors commonly perpetrated by intimate partners, acquaintances, strangers, coordinated groups, and institutions. These behaviors include using technology to stalk, harass, threaten, and silence the voices and online rights of women, girls, and people of diverse SOGIESC, as well as undermine their participation in public forums, debates, and discussions. Technology is used to sexually abuse, exploit, and traffic women and children, and as a tool of control and intimidation in the context of intimate partner violence.

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[2] Also known as "quick exit" and "safety exit" buttons or messages, these features allow someone to quickly leave a website if they are concerned it could be an issue should someone know they are seeking this kind of information, such as information about services for people experiencing intimate partner violence. They are an important element of a well-designed website that includes sensitive information. They give users the ability to leave the site quickly, if needed, and acts as a prompt that the website contains sensitive information.

to economic opportunities and essential services and resources, including health care and education (Harris et al. 2020). Consequently, digital tools, platforms, and industries must be safe and reflect the needs and interests of women, girls, and other marginalized groups.

Addressing GBV within digital development programming and across the technology sector is vital to having digital innovations, tools, and ecosystems equally serve all citizens, including women, girls, and other marginalized groups. GBV-informed digital and technology sector programming will help eradicate GBV online and offline, reduce the gender digital divide, and amplify progress toward gender equality by fostering women's social and political participation, access to economic opportunities, and other critical services and resources.

How the Technology Sector Can Address GBV

The following strategies will assist digital development and gender specialists to implement measures to prevent and respond to GBV within and through digital programming, and to build a safer and more inclusive technology sector.

Strategy #1: Use digital tools to enhance GBV prevention and response services

Program elements:
prevention, risk mitigation, response

Levels of socio-ecological model:
individual, structural

Digital technology has significant potential to enhance availability, accessibility, and quality of GBV services and improve the reach of prevention efforts. This has been demonstrated through the growth in digital and online GBV services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategies for employing digital tools to enhance GBV services include:

- Create digital products and services that improve quality and effectiveness of health, justice, and social welfare services to survivors of GBV. For example, e-justice mechanisms have the potential to increase openness, transparency, and accessibility of justice services by addressing obstacles survivors usually face, such as corruption, high costs, delays, and backlog of cases, as well as cultural and physical barriers to traveling outside their villages or communities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021). Examples of e-justice mechanisms include use of ICT to record and present victim statements and evidence, obtain remote expert assessments and reports, deliver virtual training to judicial officers on GBV, and facilitate virtual court hearings. In line with strategies to reduce GBV risks, these and other digital services for GBV survivors should be designed with built-in protections to safeguard the privacy, confidentiality, and safety of survivors using them.

- Design technology-enabled tools to support survivors' safety, well-being, and recovery. For example, smartphone applications can provide survivors with information, support safety planning, and connect survivors with services and professional and peer support.

- Use innovations with digital technologies to reduce GBV. For example, mapping software and applications are being applied to document, map, and publicize GBV incidents and patterns, and mobilize action to address GBV locally and nationally. Smartphone applications are being developed to improve safety by enabling users to alert others and seek assistance when they feel unsafe or are in imminent danger (GBV Area of Responsibility 2019).

- Utilize technology-enabled tools to prevent GBV. For example, social media can be used for public education on GBV, and podcasts can be used to spark dialogue about GBV and challenge attitudes and social norms that underpin it. ICTs can also facilitate women's access to credit, markets, business information, and networks, and provide income-earning opportunities, which contribute to women's economic empowerment (OECD 2018) (See Section 3.5. Sector-Specific Program Elements: Economic Growth and Trade).

While digital technologies provide unprecedented opportunities to improve GBV programming, communities and individuals with lower digital literacy and less Internet infrastructure and access may not benefit from these tools in the same ways. User-centered, context-specific design is critical with these types of interventions.

Strategy #2: Reduce GBV risks in digital programming

Program elements:
risk mitigation

Levels of socio-ecological model:
community, structural

Digital development initiatives should be designed in a manner that does not create safety risks for women, girls, and other marginalized groups. Strategies to integrate GBV information into digital programming to actively reduce risks should be implemented with input from GBV specialists (See Section 3.2. Program Elements: Risk Mitigation). They can advise how to implement the following strategies safely:

- Integrate GBV into digital programming tools and guidance. For example, include questions on women's and girls' safety in ICT assessments, and questions on digital safety and the gender digital divide into gender analyses. Another example is requiring safety audits and mitigation strategies in digital inclusion, finance, and development informatics initiatives (USAID n.d. c).

- Undertake community consultation in digital programming assessment and design. For example, hold meetings with male and female family gatekeepers to discuss ICT risks and ideas for how all community members can stay safe online (USAID n.d. d).

- Strengthen internal and partner capacity for risk mitigation and safeguarding in digital programming. For example, provide government, nongovernmental, and industry partners with training on technology and GBV, and offer technical support to develop and measure indicators on women's safety and empowerment (Martin 2020). Incorporate "safety by design" principles and practices when designing technology infrastructure, including hardware and public Internet access (EQUALS and GSMA n.d.).

- Include GBV organizations, experts, and survivors in user-centered co-design of digital initiatives. Involving local services, experts, and those with lived experience from the beginning of the design stage will help develop digital programming in line with Principles for Digital Development (Principles for Digital Development n.d.). These include: design with the user, understand the existing ecosystem, and be collaborative.

- Apply survivor-centered principles of safety and confidentiality (see Section 2.0. Core Principles: Survivor Centered) within all data security and privacy planning, implementation, and monitoring processes. Examples include analyzing who may have access to sensitive data, such as names or identifying features of cases and private health information, risks of unauthorized access, and leakage of stored data on individual survivors or groups of survivors (Principles for Digital Development n.d.).

Strategy #3: Prevent, mitigate, and respond to TFGBV

Program elements:
prevention, risk mitigation, response

Levels of socio-ecological model:
structural

The evidence base on addressing TFGBV is emerging; current strategies to address violence, exploitation, and abuse perpetrated online and via ICTs include:

- Support research on the nature, extent, and effects of TFGBV to inform context-specific, evidence-based policy and programming.

- Raise awareness about TFGBV among local and national government, civil society, and private-sector partners in digital innovation and programming (USAID n.d. b).

- Convene industry, civil society, government, and academic partners to foster cross-pollination, dialogue, and learning on TFGBV, and identify shared principles and standards to guide the ethical and safe introduction and use of digital technologies in development programming (Bailey and Liliefeldt 2021).

- Require partners in digital innovation and programming to implement "safety by design" principles and practices to anticipate, detect, and eliminate TFGBV threats and harms before they occur (Australian Government eSafety Commissioner n.d.).

- Support partners to establish safe TFGBV reporting and monitoring mechanisms, and establish relationships with Internet intermediaries to facilitate action on reports. It is important to learn from other contexts and consult with local actors working on GBV and digital rights to ensure that mechanisms are survivor centered and enable anonymous reporting (GBV Area of Responsibility 2021, Suzor et al. 2019).

- Promote the development of sector-specific solutions to TFGBV. For example, work with the education sector to promote the safe use of digital technologies among young people and promote awareness of how to report online violence (OECD 2018). Similarly, the democracy, human rights, and governance sectors can work to support effective legislative responses to TFGBV and promote access to justice for survivors.

Strategy #4: Support the development of an inclusive, equitable, and safe technology sector

Program elements:
risk mitigation, response, enabling environment

Levels of socio-ecological model:
structural

For digital technology to serve the safety, needs, and interests of women, girls, and other marginalized groups, women should be drivers and agents of technological and digital innovation (Dharmapuri and Shoemake 2021). An inclusive, equitable, and safe technology sector can increase women's participation and leadership. Strategies to support this include:

- Support advocacy and participation among women, people of diverse SOGIESC, and digital rights stakeholders in national technology and digital policy, lawmaking, and governance processes (OECD 2018) (See Section 3.4. Program Elements: Enabling Environment).

- Promote women's and girls' participation and leadership within the technology industry (Generation Equality Forum 2021). Approaches to do this include:

  - Strengthen girls' and women's assets and resources by providing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, building digital and essential skills, and fostering entry in the technology labor market and entrepreneurship through professional development, role models, mentoring, and leadership training (UNICEF 2020, GSMA and Oslo Metropolitan University 2020, Boccuzzi and Uniacke 2021, OECD 2018).

  - Require employers in the technology industry to promote policies that support women and gender equality in the sector, including safeguarding policies that prohibit discrimination, exploitation, harassment, and GBV within virtual and physical workplaces (Makinde et al. 2021). For more information on safeguarding policies, see Section 4.0. Process Elements: Values, Organizational Culture, and Leadership.

  - Create supportive social norms and policies within the technology industry and the community, enabling women to take a greater role in the industry (GSMA and Oslo Metropolitan University 2020).

Program Examples

Example #1: Using digital tools to enhance GBV prevention and response

The USAID WomenConnect Challenge Humanitarian Open Street Map project expanded efforts to address GBV through technology and mapping in Tanzania and Peru (Crowd2Map Tanzania n.d.). In Tanzania, the project trained members of the Women and Children's Protection Committees in 78 villages in the Serengeti to use smartphones to add points in their community, such as roads, village and neighborhood names, schools, clinics, and services, to the map through mapping and map data. A network of 87 women, known as "digital champions," were provided with smartphones and became advocates for GBV prevention and a resource for survivors to access support.

Leveraging OpenDataKit (ODK), a system was established for survivors to go directly to digital champions to submit an electronic report. Local authorities were then able to connect with digital champions over

WhatsApp to ask for additional information, such as the survivor's location, and provide guidance on how to protect or support the survivor. They could also share updates on actions taken by the authorities in response to the report. These digital champions continued to add local edits to the map, allowing first responders to use the digital maps now showing roads, villages, and other landmarks to locate survivors and those at risk of GBV in some of the most rural communities in Tanzania. The program helped women recognize when GBV was taking place in their communities, and provided them with the tools and knowledge to address it (Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team n.d.). By the end of the program, Crowd2Map witnessed a shift in attitudes associated with traditional gender norms and a greater number of community members speaking out against GBV.

Example #2: Promoting women's participation and leadership in the technology sector

The Women in Tek Network (WTN) in Cambodia was established through the USAID–funded WE Act – Pact program to support women in the technology sector by providing a needs-based, timely, and tailor-made set of integrated activities to support young women entrepreneurs working in technology (Tek4Good 2020). The initiative has used a multi-pronged strategy, including creating and expanding networking opportunities for young women in technology, mentoring young women in technology and business, influencing policy,

and engaging the community. The WTN's activities include the following:
- Creating a co-working space for young women entrepreneurs in technology
- Providing tailored coaching and mentoring for members
- Hosting networking events
- Creating a video series and speaker series
- Doing public engagement, digital campaigning, and outreach to universities
- Undertaking and disseminating policy research and policy dialogue

Tools and Resources

TFGBV

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Hinson L, J Mueller, L O'Brien-Milne, and N Wandera. 2018. *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: What Is It, and How Do We Measure It?* Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women. Accessed June 10, 2022. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICRW_TFGBVMarketing_Brief_v8-Web.pdf.

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Take Back the Tech! https://takebackthetech.net/.

USAID Gender Digital Divide (GDD) Risk Mitigation Technical Notes:

- *How to Use This GDD Risk Mitigation Technical Note*. https://www.marketlinks.org/weege-wiki/1-how-use-gdd-risk-mitigation-technical-note.
- *Practical Risk Mitigation Strategies*. https://www.marketlinks.org/weege-wiki/3-tool-1-practical-risk-mitigation-strategies.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SUGGESTED CITATION

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The goal of the Collective Action to Reduce Gender-Based Violence (CARE-GBV) activity is to strengthen USAID's collective prevention and response, or "collective action" in gender-based violence (GBV) development programming across USAID. For more information about CARE-GBV, click here.

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