



Webinar: Review and assessment of technology-based interventions to address harmful practices

18 May 2023 – Key takeaways

...

[Recording of the webinar is available here.](#)

Introduction

Nankali Maksud, UNICEF Senior Adviser Child Protection

Fui Meng Liew, UNICEF Chief Digital COE-Field Solutions

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of digital approaches to reach girls and community members increased rapidly
- An independent assessment of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage found that the adoption of digital approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining virtual engagement of adolescents and expanding coverage
- However, challenges around bridging the digital divide, quality of digital approaches, lack of monitoring and ensuring ability for two-way communication need to be addressed
- The Global Programme to End Child Marriage, together with the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) therefore commissioned a landscape review and an in-depth assessment of some of the existing digital interventions to address child marriage and FGM – to help us better understand the context where we are working, what strengths and challenges these digital approaches have and key recommendations for our work going forward

Overview of the technical landscape

Mateo Rojas, Data Pop Alliance

- In terms of access to electricity, internet and mobile phones, the African continent lags behind the Middle East and Asia, though regional averages hide variances between countries, as well as within countries, e.g., urban and rural areas
- Gender disparities exist for all indicators reviewed, across all regions
- In addition to looking at access, it is also key to look at government support for digital literacy: this ranges from medium to high support across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, indicating e.g., a plan in place for supporting digital skills and education for teachers and students in information and communications technology mainstreamed
- It is important to understand the technological context to be able to assess digital interventions used: are they relevant, are they innovative, etc.?

Landscape mapping of digital interventions

Ivette Yañez, Data Pop Alliance

- 50 interventions were mapped across 13 countries: 35 are tech-driven (tech core of the intervention) and 15 tech-enabled (tech secondary component of the intervention)
- Radio and mobile phones were the most used technologies
- Most interventions combine traditional and modern technologies (traditional such as radio, TV, SMS; more innovative or modern technologies such as social media, virtual reality)
- The interventions were mostly focused on service provision (such as helplines or an app to report cases of harmful practices) and sexual and reproductive health and rights education

- Partnerships with the private sector, such as telecommunication companies, can help reduce costs for tech-based interventions, by e.g., providing access to free phone calls
- Most interventions conducted consultations with experts in the design of the intervention, but only 13 conducted consultations with the target population
- The technological landscape is growing, despite some challenges (e.g., costs, gender digital divide), and this is an opportunity for scaling up these interventions
- To be successful, interventions need to be human centered in their design: the target population needs to be engaged in the development of and decision making around the intervention
- Sustainability needs to be ensured through collaboration, e.g., sharing information with partners, engagement of key stakeholders and through planning for scale (taking interventions beyond the pilot phase)

In-depth assessment of three digital interventions

Anna Spinardi, Data Pop Alliance

- The in-depth assessment reviewed Linha Fala Criança in Mozambique (a free telephone helpline), the Saleema Initiative in Sudan (community-based mobilization campaign, using e.g. radio and TV) and Love Matters in India (a website and resource hub)
- Some findings include:
 - Although Linha Fala Criança assessed the social and technological environment before implementation, it was still found that not all children had access to phones to make calls to the helpline, hence the intervention therefore added physical reporting boxes at schools
 - Before implementing Linha Fala Criança the organization made sure there was a clear value add to this technological intervention: existing helplines in the country did not provide the service free of charge to users
 - In the design of the Saleema Initiative, some considerations were made to girls' and women's use of technology before implementation, though consultations mainly focused on the content of the campaign rather than on the tech-components
 - There is an issue with the sustainability of the initiative, as it is mainly funded by UNICEF and there is a lack of government support
 - The organization behind Love Matters support digital literacy through trainings of young people on how to use the platform, to further their outreach and engagement
 - There is an issue with data management for Love Matters, as it is not fully clear how users' data is used and stored
 - For both the Saleema Initiative and Love Matters, an issue is the lack of digital access in rural areas, where the prevalence of FGM respective child marriage tends to be higher
- Some overall recommendations include:
 - It is important to combine tech-features with non-tech to overcome challenges with access in certain areas (such as rural) and among certain groups of people (e.g. girls, people with disability)
 - Everyone that is engaged in data collection needs to be trained on safe data measures, to ensure data is collected, used and stored in the correct way
 - Intersectional feminist approaches need to be strengthened, e.g., there are few considerations made to people with disabilities
 - There needs to be standardized monitoring and evaluation tool for tracking implementation and progress of the interventions, not planned as an afterthought, but it needs to be integrated already from the design stage of the intervention

- Digital literacy training needs to be provided to users, including on how to keep one's data safe
- Adopt language and content used to the target audience to ensure applicability of the intervention

Discussion/Q&A

- The selection of interventions in the in-depth assessment was based on criteria that emerged from the initial landscape mapping, including adherence to principles for digital development and application of intersectional feminist approaches
- The regions of focus mirrors the scope of the two global, joint programmes: key consideration to see how we might be able to expand the review to other regions as well
- As of now, the assessment did not focus on the impact of the interventions. Other sectors, such as the health sector, might be more mature in this space, but for harmful practices this is still a quite a new space and this first space was to map what we are doing to be able to assess these approaches to guide us going forward
- Important to evaluate interventions, before scaling up to ensure impact and to see that there is a clear value add of the digital component
- As part of the technology maturity assessment, one dimension focuses on whether the intervention takes into account the gender digital divide (initial assessment during the design), and whether aspects to the intervention were added as needed to address this divide (e.g. the Saleema Initiative rolled out a radio show and provided radios to girls and women who did not own one in target areas)
- The increase in use of technology during the pandemic was not necessarily to primarily increase reach of the interventions, but rather it was a necessary change during lockdowns to ensure continued outreach at all
- It is crucial to consider safety for users, as well as their scalability and content – the technology component is just one thing, we need to assess these interventions holistically
- Engaging girls and women in the design of digital approaches is key, including to ensure their safety in use of these technological platforms and tools, in line with 'do no harm' principles

Additional resources

- UNFPA, UNICEF and Data Pop Alliance: [Review of technology-based interventions to address child marriage and female genital mutilation](#)
- UNICEF: [Technical guidance on Digital and remote approaches in eliminating harmful practices](#)
- UNFPA: [Guidance on the safe and ethical use of technology to address gender-based violence and harmful practices: Implementation summary](#)