

GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE

# HOW TO USE THIS GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE

Photo: Riaz Jahanpour for USAID / Digital Development Communications



## INTRODUCTION

This Gender Digital Divide Risk Mitigation Technical Note has been developed to address the constraints to women's equitable participation in the national, regional, and global economy. Key areas of focus are: women's access to and use of information and communication technology (ICT); the negative consequences and potential risks to women and girls entailed in coming online; and how to mitigate these risks.

This document is designed as a companion piece to the [Gender Digital Divide Gender Analysis Technical Resource](#), which offers practical tools and resources to be used by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) staff and partners, helping them to integrate the gender digital divide at every phase—into gender analyses with a women's economic empowerment and gender equality (WEEGE) lens at global, country, and regional strategic planning levels, into program and activity design and implementation, and into monitoring and evaluation.

This Gender Digital Divide Technical Note offers concrete risk mitigation strategies, including examples of how these issues have been addressed in existing initiatives.



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## ACRONYMS

<b>ADS</b> .....	Automated Directives System
<b>APC</b> .....	Association for Progressive Communications
<b>EIGE</b> .....	European Institute for Gender Equality
<b>GBV</b> .....	Gender-based Violence
<b>GSMA</b> .....	Global System for Mobile Communication Association
<b>ICRW</b> .....	International Center for Research on Women
<b>ICT</b> .....	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IVR</b> .....	Interactive Voice Response
<b>ITU</b> .....	International Telecommunication Union
<b>USAID</b> .....	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WEEGE</b> .....	Women’s Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality

## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Biometrics:** biological or physiological characteristics which can be used for automatic registration. Those characteristics include fingerprints, facial structure, iris or retinal patterns, DNA, voice, and signature.

**Cybersecurity:** the prevention of damage to, protection of, and restoration of computers, electronic communications systems, electronic communications services, wire communication, and electronic communication, including information contained therein, to ensure its availability, integrity, authentication, confidentiality, and nonrepudiation.<sup>1</sup>

**Data privacy:** the right of an individual or group to maintain control over, and the confidentiality of, information about themselves, especially when that intrusion results from undue or illegal gathering and use of data about that individual or group.<sup>2</sup>

**Digital economy:** the use of digital and Internet infrastructure by individuals, businesses, and government to interact with each other, engage in economic activity, and access both digital and non-digital goods and services.<sup>3</sup>

**Digital literacy:** the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital devices and networked technologies for participation in economic and social life. This may include competencies that are variously referred to as computer literacy, information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, information literacy, and media literacy.<sup>4</sup>

**Gender-based violence (GBV):** an umbrella term for any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, or lack of adherence to socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. GBV is typically characterized by the use (or threat) of physical, psychological, sexual, economic, legal, political, or social coercion, control, or abuse. GBV impacts individuals across the life course, and it has direct and indirect costs to families, communities, economies, global public health, and development.<sup>5</sup>

**Information and communication technology (ICT):** a set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage information. These can include video, radio, television, the Internet, social media platforms, and mobile phones. Distinctions are emerging between “old” and “new” forms of media and technology — that is, between the use of television, radio, and other forms of traditional media that have been employed for decades, and newer forms of media, including social media and mobile phones.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> USAID Digital Strategy 2020: [www.usaid.gov/usaid-digital-strategy/06-annex-iii](http://www.usaid.gov/usaid-digital-strategy/06-annex-iii)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> United States strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence globally. U.S. Government, 2016. Available at [www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/258703.pdf](http://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/258703.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Harnessing technology to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies. Social Development Direct, undated. Available at [www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1790/gbv-and-technology-guidance-final-draft.pdf](http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1790/gbv-and-technology-guidance-final-draft.pdf)

**Interactive Voice Response (IVR):** pre-recorded audio messages that allow a direct user response, and that collect metadata like date, time, and duration of call.<sup>7</sup>

**Mobile ownership, access, and use:** women's ownership, access, and use of ICT are different definitions: ownership necessitates that the mobile phone is registered in the woman's name. Access and use imply a larger pool, where women can utilize others' phones or community phones. Even if a mobile phone is registered to a woman, it does not mean that she is the primary user — as is the case when the government ties a mobile phone number to a person's larger national ID number, and the person wants to get a second mobile. Both mobile phone use and ownership are important statistics as they can, at times, serve as proxies for family and gender dynamics in the household.

**Open application programming interface (API):** a publicly available API that provides developers with access to a proprietary software application or web service.

**Open source code:** publicly available software (or code) that any programmer or developer can use or modify. These are usually stored in platforms such as GitHub.

**Technology-facilitated GBV:** action that harms others — either based on their sexual or gender identity, or by enforcing harmful gender norms — that is carried out (by one or more people) using the Internet and/or mobile technology. Actions include stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech, and exploitation.<sup>8</sup>

**Women's economic empowerment and gender equality (WEEGE):** women's economic empowerment exists when women can equitably participate in, contribute to, and benefit from economic opportunities as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, and investors. This requires access to and control over assets and resources, as well as the capability and agency to manage the terms of their own labor and the benefits accrued. Women's economic equality exists when all women and girls have the same opportunities as men and boys for education, economic participation, decision-making, and freedom from violence. This requires collectively addressing barriers to commercial activity and labor market participation, such as restrictive laws, policies, and cultural norms; infrastructure and technology challenges; unpaid care work; limits on collective action; and poorly enforced protections. Women's economic equality is just one facet of gender equality more generally, which requires attention to the full range of gender gaps — economic, political, educational, social and otherwise.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it? ICRW, 2018.

Available at [https://n2r4h9b5.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICRW\\_TFGBVMarketing\\_Brief\\_v8-Web.pdf](https://n2r4h9b5.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICRW_TFGBVMarketing_Brief_v8-Web.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Working definition used for the Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality Technical Assistance task order under the Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract.

## KEY MESSAGES

- » **ICT enables access to critical health services** as well as opportunities for education, civic participation, employment, entrepreneurship, and access to finance.
- » **It acts as a vital gateway for women and girls to access information** that can improve their livelihoods, and it contributes to women’s economic empowerment and gender equality.
- » **However, in an increasingly digital world, the cost of digital exclusion is increasing.** The gap between the digital “haves” and “have nots” is a gap in income, opportunity, education, and wealth. Limitations on use of ICT by women and girls will harm their ability to participate.
- » **There is a large global gender digital divide** in women’s access to and use of ICT, which means that women and girls are being left behind.
- » **Closing the gender digital divide is a crucial part of realizing USAID’s overarching goal of self-reliance:** without empowered women, countries will be left behind.
- » **At the same time, ICT can be a double-edged sword for women and girls,** and there are often unintended consequences of ICT that can threaten a woman’s safety and wellbeing.
- » **Fears and concerns about the risks of mobile use and the Internet,** for women and girls, can restrict their access and participation in ICT, widening the gender digital divide.
- » **These risks include technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV)** (such as cyberstalking, harassment, or cyberbullying); cybersecurity and data privacy risks; and reinforcement of gender inequalities.
- » **This technical note offers concrete risk mitigation strategies,** including examples of how these issues have been addressed in existing initiatives.

## PURPOSE

The information that follows offers practical steps, strategies, and resources to be used by USAID staff and partners for mitigating the risks associated with women and girls accessing and using ICT, with examples of on-the-ground solutions.

## COMPONENTS



The **Reader** provides an overview of risks associated with ICT for women and girls.



**Tool 1** lays out strategies to mitigate these risks, including practical actions to take, checklists, and examples of how others have done it.



**Resources 1–3** offer some key readings for deeper knowledge, as well as country or regional secondary datasets and available documents that can be leveraged and adapted.

These tools and resources can be used either together or as stand-alone documents, depending on the context. They are designed to be flexible and illustrative: they can be adapted or used as jumping-off points and prompts.

## BOX 1. HOW DOES THIS RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE ALIGN WITH USAID CHAPTERS 205, 201, AND THE WEEGE TECHNICAL GUIDE?

This Gender Digital Divide Risk Mitigation Technical Note builds upon the WEEGE Technical Guide.

The WEEGE Technical Guide is aligned with [USAID Automated Directives System \(ADS\) Chapters 201 and 205](#). It enables USAID staff to design, procure, implement, monitor, and evaluate programs that increase women's economic empowerment and gender equality outcomes. The six-unit WEEGE Technical Guide contains practical tools, resources, and samples to integrate WEEGE into the USAID program cycle. The WEEGE tools can be used together as a package or as stand-alone aids, as needed. USAID staff, contractors, partners, and collaborators are encouraged to use the rest of the guide as they seek to advance WEEGE.

This Gender Digital Divide Risk Mitigation Technical Note builds off the WEEGE tools to give a deep dive into the risks associated with ICT for women and girls, and to help USAID staff and partners understand how to mitigate those risks in any work they do that has a digital component. Mitigating risks aligns directly with WEEGE Principle 7 (Address Gender-based Violence), and it fits into [U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally](#) as part of a wider agenda to empower women and girls.

This note (along with the Gender Digital Divide Gender Analysis Technical Resource) is therefore designed to be used alongside the WEEGE Technical Guide, using and adapting the tools provided there.

## BOX 2. HOW DOES THIS RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE LINK TO THE USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY?

The [USAID Digital Strategy](#) aims to strengthen open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems in each country where USAID works. No country will be self-reliant if its citizens cannot benefit equally from the gains of a global digital ecosystem. USAID recognizes that the gender digital divide significantly hampers the ability of ICT to help women improve their own lives while enhancing the stability of their families and the resilience of their communities.

ICT can give women and underrepresented populations access to finance, new markets and business opportunities, education, health, agriculture, and other life-enhancing services, as well as greater security, more time-savings, and a voice.



## BOX 2. CONTINUED

In line with the [USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy](#), increasing women’s access to, and use of, mobile and the Internet can help reduce gender disparities in access to, control over, and benefits from resources, wealth, opportunities, and services, and it can increase the capability of women and girls to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making.

Through the Digital Strategy, USAID is committed to women’s empowerment and to closing the gender digital divide—by scaling understanding across the agency of the gender digital divide, by sharing best practices learned in previous gender and ICT programs (including the [WomenConnect Challenge](#)), and by ensuring that USAID digital development efforts address digital inequalities and mitigate potential risks or harms for women and girls coming online.

This Gender Digital Divide Risk Mitigation Technical Note (along with the [Gender Digital Divide Gender Analysis Technical Resource](#)) forms part of the USAID Digital Strategy in closing the gender digital divide by building awareness and capacity of USAID staff, partners, and partner countries of the gender digital divide, specifically around the risks of women and girls using ICT, and how these risks can be mitigated.

# DOCUMENTS IN THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE



## HOW TO USE THIS GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE



## UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS OF ICT TO WOMEN AND GIRLS



## TOOL 1: PRACTICAL RISK MITIGATION STRATEGIES

- » STRATEGY 1: UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT AND THE RISKS: “FIRST, DO NO HARM”
- » STRATEGY 2: INVEST IN, SUPPORT, AND SHARE INSIGHTS ON DIGITAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES THAT MITIGATE RISKS
- » STRATEGY 3: SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN ICT OUTREACH AND DIGITAL LITERACY INITIATIVES
- » STRATEGY 4: SUPPORT INITIATIVES THAT INVOLVE (MALE/FEMALE/FAMILY) GATEKEEPERS
- » STRATEGY 5: RAISE AWARENESS
- » STRATEGY 6: COLLABORATE AND WORK WITH OTHER NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
- » STRATEGY 7: STRENGTHEN INTERNAL AND PARTNER CAPACITY FOR RISK MITIGATION AND SAFEGUARDING



## RESOURCES 1–3: KEY DOCUMENTS