



1 February 2017

**Call for inputs from industry and the tech community, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to a report on “ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective”**

**Deadline 15 February 2017**

Background

On 1 July 2016, the Human Rights Council adopted [Resolution 32/13](#) on “The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet”.

Paragraph 13 of the resolution requests “the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective, in consultation with States, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, international organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society, industry, technical community and academia and other stakeholders, and to submit it to the Council at its thirty-fifth session” in June 2017.

For the preparation of this report, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) invites inputs from industry and the technical community, as well as from any other organizations engaged in activities related to the gender digital divide. For this purpose we have prepared a questionnaire (please see attached) and would appreciate your responses. Please feel free to address any other issues that may be considered useful for this report. We would also welcome receiving copies of recent reports or publications by your organization on this subject.

Submissions and responses to the questionnaire should be a **maximum of 5 pages** in length, and will be made available for consultation on the OHCHR website.

Please send submissions and responses by **15 February 2017** to [registry@ohchr.org](mailto:registry@ohchr.org) with the subject title: "Input to Report on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective."

For further information, please see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/WaystoBridgetheGenderDigital.aspx>

## 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).**

Obstacles and barriers to digital technologies and digital life are either general or gendered, and oftentimes both. Traditional barriers to digital technologies are economic, lack of internet infrastructure and literacy. These barriers however are also particularly gendered in the sense that women also experience these disadvantages differently and more acutely on account of their gender. Women are particularly disadvantaged in terms of their position in society, workplace and even in relation to their own families with the same wage bracket. For these reasons barrier to digital technologies and digital life are more enhanced for women.

Political reasons also act as barriers to access to digital technologies. For instance, the internet has been shut down in FATA for security reasons, as well as to silence political dissent. While this might seem like gender-neutral factor, our research has found that women are more impacted by such politically motivated shutdowns given that they cannot travel to internet cafes that have sprung up in the region.

Lack of mobility experienced by women due to cultural and religious norms severely impedes their ability to access internet and devices, especially in areas where every home does not have an internet connection or there is no mobile data internet. While men from the same family might be able to access the internet in other spaces, women confined to the home are not able to attain that level of connectivity.

Cultural mores also dictate that some women do not own personal devices such as smartphones or can only access digital spaces through shared accounts and devices. This imposes severe limits on the activities women can engage with in online spaces given the knowledge that their activities are being monitored.

Online harassment and violence against women in cyber spaces means that the little access that women do have is severely hindered by the abuse that happens online. This occurs due to cultural norms and gendered stereotypes being reproduced in online spaces. Online abuse can the form of blackmailing, misuse of personal information and pictures, impersonation, threats and hate speech. These instances of online harassment have led to the retreat of many women from online spaces.

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

Digital Rights Foundation identifies first and foremost as a feminist organization. The services we provide and the advocacy that we engage in puts women at the centre of its decisions. DRF provides services in the form of digital security trainings and the Cyber Harassment Helpline. Both these services are specifically targeted towards women with the express purpose of providing them with digital security training in order to keep themselves secure and to provide them with the emotional and legal support to counter harassment online. These services take into account problems that are particularly to women and provides confidentiality, anonymity and gender-sensitive assistance.

The research that DRF does takes gender into account and explores the experiences of women with regards to digital devices and spaces. Furthermore, DRF's advocacy is geared towards reforming legal institutions and laws that impact women's rights and protections in online spaces.

**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.**

Our organization collected gender segregated data during its Hamara Internet campaign by conducting surveys with young women and girls (this research is to be released soon). This data records the access that women have to digital technologies, the nature of their access and the instances and kinds of harassment that they face there.

Furthermore, the Cyber Harassment Helpline also collects non-personally identifiable information from its callers, and gender is one of the categories of data collection. This data records the number of women who report harassment to the Helpline, the kind of harassment faced by the callers and where this harassment is occurring. The data pertaining to Helpline is available on a monthly basis on DRF's website.

**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.**

Reach 60 callers per month through the Cyber Harassment Helpline. The aim of the Helpline is to provide services regarding online harassment to people all over Pakistan. For that reason, DRF aims to ensure that the callers are from a wide cross-section of Pakistani society. In order to ensure diversity, DRF analyses the regional patterns in its callers and sets targets to fill gaps through its outreach activities. Furthermore, DRF also aims to encourage victims of online harassment to call in themselves and directly. For that reason the Helpline collects gender specific data according to those calling themselves and those people calling on someone's behalf. This information is also used

to set targets for trust-building. These targets change according the data and experiences from the previous month to make the targets responsive to the needs of customers.

Deliver training sessions on cyber harassment and digital security training to 2 schools per month. These training sessions have an average of 50-60 students and the training sessions are geared towards the gender and age-range of the audience.

**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?**

Digital Rights Foundation sees gender as a differentiated category that is intersected by other identities and categories such as class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, geographical location, age and disabilities. Different women have different needs and Digital Rights Foundation seeks to provide services that are accessible to everyone and tailored to meet different needs. Furthermore, we seek to make our advocacy efforts as inclusive as possible and make gendered analysis the basis of our critique of laws and policies.

One approach to ensure inclusivity has been to provide services that are available all over Pakistan. The Cyber Harassment Helpline provides free and accessible services to people all over Pakistan. These services are provided without any prejudice to gender, class and ethnicity. Solutions provided by the Helpline are geared towards the specific needs of the women who call in. Furthermore, Hamara Internet project has travelled to all four provinces of Pakistan (and additionally Gilgit Baltistan). Digital Rights Foundation also reaches out to ICTs and social media companies to contextualise the problems of women from Pakistan, or particular regions of the country. Sometimes ICTs do not understand the cultural context of particular abuse and the dire consequences that it can have. DRF works to translate and contextualise those differences for companies based in urban areas of Pakistan or in other countries.

In terms of alternative communication mechanisms, the first stage is to get more women to be able to use the internet. Low cost packages need to be targeted at areas where the digital divide is stark. This will improve the overall access in the area, but particularly effect women who have less access to finances. ICTs also need to improve their access of services to marginalized areas as well.

Secondly, once access is given, the content needs to be accessible. There should be more content produced in Urdu and other regional languages. Services should be directed towards those with limited literacy (more visuals and sounds), and for users with disabilities. This is particularly important for digital companies that provide services and government websites that give vital information for civic participation.

Thirdly, in order to make the internet safer for women, there is a need for alternate reporting mechanisms against harassment that are easier to use and are available in

regional languages as well. The mechanism in place for handling the complaints needs to take the cultural, social and political context of the area from which the complaint is originating.

### **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.).<sup>1</sup>**

DRF is a civil society organization that is part of several coalitions with other women human rights defenders and women's rights organizations. DRF works with these organizations to mainstream digital gender issues and to integrate larger women's and human rights into its mission. DRF is on working groups and coalitions that have several feminist organizations and brings up issues of online harassment and gender equality in digital spaces in these fora.

Furthermore, digital rights foundation gets feedback from its callers on the effectiveness of our services and takes into account suggestions from victims of online harassment. The experiences of our callers are used to make recommendations to government authorities and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs).

DRF also conducts pre and post assessment surveys to gauge the effectiveness of its training and awareness sessions. These surveys help the organization gauge the problem on the ground and get feedback on which strategies were effective and which were not. The Hamara Internet surveys are now being used to improve existing training sessions.

- 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.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Other human rights considerations that could/should be taken into consideration include freedoms of expression, association, religion or belief, freedom from violence, right to education, life, health, identity, an adequate standard of living, to participate in government and in cultural life, promotion of gender equality and rights of non-discrimination, rights of indigenous peoples, minority rights, rights of migrant workers, right to enjoy the benefits of scientific advancement, etc.

Digital Rights Foundation has developed the Hamara Internet smartphone application that provides information and resources targeted at young women to keep themselves safe in online spaces. This application is easy to use and contains digital security tips and external links for reporting harassment. The application is available in both English and Urdu.

This application is supplemented by literature and guidebooks (both in English and Urdu) that provide detailed information on privacy, safe use of social media and digital rights for young women. These guidebooks are disseminated at our training sessions, and are available free of cost online and at [www.hamarainternet.org](http://www.hamarainternet.org).

Digital Rights Foundation, through its awareness sessions and trainings, also encourages women to reclaim online spaces and use them as arenas for empowerment. These trainings are supplemented by the Cyber Harassment Helpline that provides assistance in real time so that women can remain on the internet and address the problems they face in a constructive manner. The overall aim is to empower women to return to the internet, despite challenges that they have previously faced.

DRF also works with human rights defenders to help them secure themselves in digital spaces and work not to be implicated by the cyber laws in Pakistan. DRF feels that this work is important as it supports existing women's rights organizations in the face of new challenges in the digital world.

**8. Does your company/organization take into account the gender and ICT targets contained in the UN Sustainable Development Goals?<sup>2</sup> Please elaborate.**

-

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

DRF was deeply involved in advocacy efforts regarding the cyber crime bill that was passed in August, 2016. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA) contains sections that deal with cyber bullying, stalking, harassment and hate speech. Section 11 of PECA deals with hate speech, section 21 deals with the manipulation of personal information and pictures and section 24 deals with cyber stalking. However the ministry of information technology is yet to draft the rules and regulations under the Act

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.



to make some the mechanisms implementable.

DRF also works with the Cyber Crime Wing of the FIA to facilitate complaints of online harassment and cyber violence. The FIA is the designated authority under the PECA to handle cases under the Act. Furthermore the IT policies at the federal and provincial level also impact areas of gender equality; in fact gender equity is one of the stated aims of these policies.

DRF directly works with victims of online harassment through its helpline, which is operative from Monday to Friday (9 AM to 5 PM). The Helpline provides counselling services to help victims experiencing emotional distress and works with its referral system to take down content that violates victims' privacy. The Helpline actively coordinates with social media companies and the FIA to make reporting cases gender sensitive and culturally contextualised.

**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)?<sup>3</sup>**

Given that the FIA Cyber Crime Wing is severely understaffed, underfunded and geographically limited, DRF wishes to act as a facilitator for victims to make sure that their complaints are directed towards the correct avenues, that the victims are aware of their rights before approaching the authorities and, in cases of official abuse, to hold the authorities accountable for abuse of power. Additionally, we also communicate updates on cases or instructions from LEAs to the victims, especially when there is a communication gap between the two stakeholders.

In cases where a formal complaint is not possible, due to lack of evidence or unwillingness on part of the victim, DRF also provides digital security solutions to address the problem.

Furthermore, through its advocacy work, DRF seeks to put pressure on the state and LEAs to improve their reporting mechanisms and the services that they provide to victims of cyber harassment. DRF researches on issues of privacy and rights violations to shed light on these issues and use the research towards advocacy efforts.

**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?**

---

<sup>3</sup> See UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Principles 29 - 31.

DRF has conducted research in the area of gendered surveillance and the differentiated impact of surveillance and technological oversight on women, an area that is quite underdeveloped in Pakistan. DRF takes a critical view of the impact of digital technologies and mechanisms that have the effect of monitoring women and impacting them differently than men.

Digital Rights Foundation has also been critical of applications geared towards women. Several smart-phone applications are emerging that are aimed specifically at women, both by the state and the private sector, and there is a need to critically analyse the claims that these apps make regarding increased security for women. Furthermore, as space opens up in Pakistan for web-based delivery of services, DRF is engaging in research that aims to highlight the privacy violations as well the impact on the women who use these services. This is precisely why DRF is working towards privacy and data protection legislation that will ensure more rights for users and protect vulnerable groups, such as women, from surveillance and discrimination.

**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).**

DRF has conducted the Hamara Internet campaign targeting young women in schools and colleges. Furthermore, DRF also engages in cyber-bullying campaigns aimed at children and teenagers in schools. These trainings seek to empower women to reclaim online spaces and keep themselves safe online, while at the same time also sensitizing young men about gender stereotypes and harassment. These campaigns aim to create awareness about safe practices online and generate a debate about digital rights in general so that the young students grow up to be ethical and responsible netizens.

**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?**

DRF regularly takes part in citizen participation forums, consultancies and public advocacy efforts in collaboration with other human rights organizations and government



fora. DRF has spoken at government-citizen forums to highlight the need for women and victim-centric reform at the governmental level. Digital Rights Foundation also engages in legal advocacy regarding legislation and amendments to proposed bills, having worked with law makers and experts in the past to proposed amendments to the cyber crime bill.

At the international level, representatives from DRF have participated in IGF to talk about issues of privacy, data protection and online harassment. The issues of gender have been raised at both the level of South Asian fora and international conferences to bring to the fore the particular perspective and context of Pakistan.

**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?**

It is very important to have the industry stakeholders on board for initiatives to bridge the digital gender divide. Given that large parts of the internet are slowly becoming the domain of companies, support and gender sensitization of the companies is an important step forward.

First of all it is important to make the companies aware of their responsibility to ensure better privacy policies when it comes to the personal data of users. Data breaches and violations of privacy can have serious consequences for women. In Pakistan, with the absence of data protection laws and obligations, it is even more important to engage with the industry and communicate their responsibility in protecting users' data and right to privacy.

Secondly, the tech community should take measures to ensure the promotion of more women to leadership positions and to have more representation from women and marginalized communities. This representation is important because the presence of women will mean more gender-sensitive policies and a better understanding of the issues that women face. Furthermore, the presence of more women might also lead to the creation of more content geared towards women and electronic-based service delivery that actually addresses the problems that women face. Ensuring more participation will not however automatically lead to gendered policies and content. In fact, conscious efforts from the tech community need to be made to redress these gaps.

Thirdly, it is important to ensure that the companies working towards gender issues and on gender empowerment engage with these themes meaningfully rather than superficial efforts or as marketing ploys. When efforts are made to ensure women-centric content or applications, they should be geared towards all kinds of women and take into account the intersection of problems that women face.

Fourthly, many tech companies own social media platforms which are the primary site of online harassment, bullying, blackmail and violence. These companies need to have contextually-sensitive policies for protecting the privacy, dignity and personal integrity

of women in online spaces. Tech companies often cite free speech and logistical hurdles to taking down content that causes harassment and mental distress. Tech companies need to be more responsive to the needs of their female users and come up with innovative solutions to counter online harassment.

Fifthly, tech companies also need to ensure that efforts to ensure accessibility should be done in the principle of net neutrality and the principle of free access should be upheld in efforts to improve coverage and accessibility.