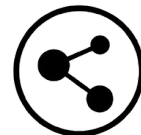# RECOMMENDATIONS: COMBATING TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ETHIOPIA

This recommendations document is the product of discussions at roundtables and workshops in Addis Ababa and virtually. The recommendations come directly from those working on human rights in Ethiopia. Several initiatives are already underway to combat TFGBV or related harms. Where appropriate, CIR has spotlighted them throughout the recommendations document.

WHAT IS TFGBV?

"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" UNFPA 2023.

WHY RESEARCH TFGBV?

As personal and public lives are increasingly played out on the internet and through social media, a new frontier in the fight against gender-based violence has emerged. Understanding TFGBV and the differences in hate speech targeting women and girls provides an entry point for targeted policy solutions to safeguard them online and offline.

WHY COMBAT TFGBV?

This study emphasises the importance of creating safe online environments for women and girls to empower their full participation in public life.

Several of the Ethiopian women interviewed reported feeling silenced, with many withdrawing from online and offline public spaces, because of the TFGBV.
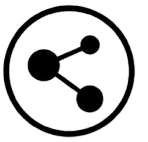
SCAN THE CODE

TO READ THE RESEARCH

www.infores.org/tfgbvinethiopia

INTRODUCTION

This research into TFGBV in Ethiopia highlights that women and girls in Ethiopia suffer from several different types of TFGBV, including gendered hate speech. The findings revealed the toxicity of online environments in Ethiopia and how online abuse directed against women and girls reflects existing societal divisions around the role of women and girls in society, as well as in relation to ethnicity, politics, and religion. To have a lasting effect, any strategies to combat TFGBV must address its root causes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Women and girls experience different types of online abuse compared to men and boys, with gendered stereotypes, mockery, and irony being prevalent.

- The risks associated with being female online are heightened when other protected characteristics, such as ethnicity and religion, are targeted.

- Hate speech targeting women and girls varies across social media platforms, with differences in the types of hate speech seen on each platform.

- Hate speech directed at women and girls differs from hate speech against other identity groups, often suggesting their inferiority and containing gendered stereotypes.

- Discussions during roundtables and workshops highlighted the need for better education on hate speech and its impact.

- The study emphasises the importance of creating safe online environments for women and girls to empower their full participation in public life.

- Understanding the differences in hate speech targeting women and girls provides an entry point for targeted policy solutions to safeguard them online.

RESEARCH AIMS

- *Strengthen the evidence base on TFGBV in Ethiopia.*

- *Inform government institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), social media companies, and the general public about TFGBV in Ethiopia.*

- *Empower CSOs and government institutions in Ethiopia with practical recommendations on how to address TFGBV, including policies and community-led initiatives.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. EDUCATION

2. LAW AND POLICY

3. COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSES

4. PLATFORM ACCOUNABILITY

5. AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

6. SUPPORT WOMEN AND GIRLS

7. CONTINUED RESEARCH

1. EDUCATION
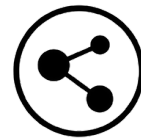
Discussions during roundtables and workshops highlighted the need for better education on gender equality and TFGBV, including hate speech and its impact. Education must focus on changing the behaviour of perpetrators and bystanders as well as protecting survivors. The suggested educational campaigns and target groups are outlined below.

TARGET GROUPS

Existing projects focus on the youth through education in schools and universities. These campaigns should continue and be rolled out to other societal groups. Interviewees told CIR that gendered narratives seen online reflect narratives seen offline, in the mainstream media, TV, and adverts. During roundtables, participants noted that influential individuals should also be offered 'train the trainer' courses and that workplaces often lack policies that safeguard female colleagues from gendered abuse..

- Youth (schools, universities)
- Media houses (including journalists, editors)
- Advertisers, TV/film producers.
- Activists and celebrities
- Educators (teachers, religious leaders)
- Law enforcement (judges, lawyers and police)

EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

COUNTERING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Education on gender equality and human rights is essential and should be included in school curriculums. Workshop participants noted that feminism and women's rights are often labelled as western ideals. However, across Ethiopia, women and girls carry out diverse roles. Training materials using examples from Ethiopian communities can show that gender equality is an Ethiopian value. Setaweet delivers Gendershops which aim to challenge the perceptions of gender norms in high schools.

HATE SPEECH EDUCATION

The workshops revealed that hate speech is often misunderstood, leading to certain forms of TFGBV being overlooked. Additionally, gendered stereotypes, insults, demeaning language, or speech implying inferiority, are often considered less harmful than hate speech that is threatening or aggressive. Better education on what constitutes hate speech and gendered abuse, how to identify it, and its impact, is essential.

MEDIA LITERACY PROGRAMMES

Media literacy programmes should have a gendered element. Improving media literacy, instilling critical thinking, and developing analytical awareness in social media users and media consumers can provide individuals with the tools to tackle information integrity challenges.
Education on these topics would empower individuals to challenge stereotypical views of women, mockery, or demeaning speech. For example Mersa Media Institute are promoting free Media and Information Literacy Training.
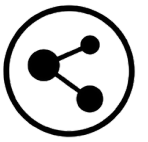
SPOTLIGHT ON

Setaweet ለያታ እኩልነት

The objective of the Gendershops is to challenge the accepted gender norms, stereotypes, and ideas of femininity and masculinity, as well as beauty ideals.

Article35

launching ceremony for establishing Human Rights Clubs

May 22, 2022 | Joshua

EHRDC

CARD
የመብቶች እና ዴሞክራሲ ዕድገት ማዕከል
CENTER FOR ADVANCEMENT OF RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

MEDIA LITRACY

NED
Media and Information Literacy Training for youth

Media Smart Youth Ethiopia
Empowered and responsible

2. LAW AND POLICY

People may claim that TFGBV is not as grievous as offline abuse. However, workshop participants explained how these crimes are severe and personal. Survivors may recieve TFGBV while at home, perhaps while sitting on the sofa or lying in bed, meaning the abuser has violated the safe spaces they reside in. Ensuring law and policy take TFGBV seriously is essential in protecting women online and offline.

APPROACHES

REFORM

Most existing laws and policies are not designed with TFGBV in mind. The judicial system should **review existing legislation** and bolster its protection of women and girls.

While most existing laws might not make the distinction between online and offline spaces, this should not be viewed as a barrier to application.

DEVELOP

The judiciary should **enact new laws** that criminalise online harassment, stalking, gendered hate speech (in all forms) and other forms of TFGBV including revenge pornography, and **ensure all new legislation is reviewed** with the internet and TFGBV in mind.

Develop Government-led policies that commit organisations to develop and implement **workplace policies on GBV (online and offline) and harassment,** as well as training courses for workplaces. A few organisations have already developed these policies, including Mersa Media and CARD.

TFGBV survivors should be consulted during the development of new laws and policies, as should Ethiopian experts, including professional organisations, individuals and activists, that work to combat TFGBV.

REPORT

Effective reporting mechanisms are lacking, leaving women and girls at risk. Where CSOs are actively working on such mechanisms, **funding should be allocated.**

Reporting and effective complaint procedures should be developed, with penalties for abusers. This could include a tiered penalty system: warnings, fines, and ultimately, legal action. The Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation No.1185/2020 recognises the severity of hate speech, and provides criminal liability for an offense, including imprisonment, fines or community service. Individuals, organisations, and judicial bodies should be supported to bring forward TFGBV related claims under the Hate Speech Proclamation to the relevant authorities.

Collaborate with tech companies to ensure that reporting mechanisms on platforms are effective and in line with the hate speech and disinformation prevention and suppression proclamation No.1185/2020, which outlines platform's responsibility to: prevent dissemination of hate speech and remove content within 24 hours of its reporting (Articles 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3).

IMPLEMENT

Implement the 958 Computer Crime Proclamation. Articles 12, 13, 14 and 16 of the Proclamation contain provisions that are directly related to TFGBV and could be used to raise awareness and pursue accountability. For example, Article 12 criminalises sexually explicit conduct directed towards minors (including creation, dissemination, or obtaining imagery). Article 13 includes many acts that classify as TFGBV. Article 14 could be used for hate speech related offenses and Article 16 places criminal liability on service providers for disseminating or not responding to activity that breaches Articles 14-15. As such, this provides a promising avenue for accountability for TFGBV.

EQUIP

Individuals who already have a mandate to work on hate speech, gender based violence, technology and innovation, or the rights of women (including judges, lawyers, police and government ministries) should be **educated and equipped to investigate, identify, report, and prosecute TFGBV.**
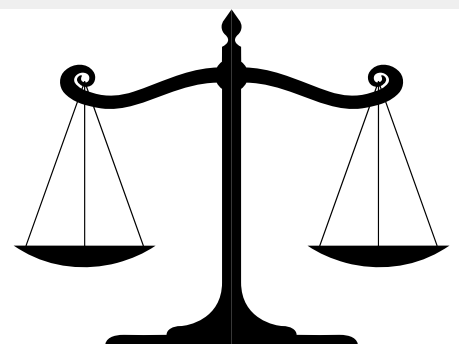
3. COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSES
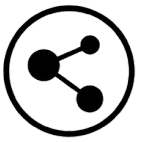
Everyone can contribute to making the online space a safer environment by calling out harmful online behaviours and supporting those who experience online abuse. Prevent yourself from being an online bystander… be active!

BUILD A COMMUNITY

There is power in numbers. An individual is less likely to harass an entire group or community than they are a single person. The purpose of TFGBV is to silence or discredit individuals, push them out of certain spaces, enforce an attitude or belief, or instil fear and intimidation. Creating an **online network of people to report content** that contains gendered hate speech can provide a valuable tool, **providing agency** to TFGBV survivors and a sense of **community**, while **combating and mitigating the impact** of hate speech.

CREATE A COUNTER-NARRATIVE

Respond to the original content by:
- **Exposing myths, misconceptions, and disparities** about specific gender roles in Ethiopia.
- **Providing evidence-based data and context** to counter the harmful content and correct false information that is being disseminated.
- **Creating counter narratives** using local examples (e.g. women's rights as an Ethiopian value).
- **Redirecting the conversation** by posting positive and constructive comments.
- **Reclaiming or repurposing hashtags.**
- Reposting the harmful content with clear statements **highlighting the impact and possible consequences** of TFGBV.
- **Identifying breaches of Ethiopian proclamations:** Hate Speech or 958 Computer Crime.

SPOTLIGHT ON

IDENTIFY 👁

Be mindful of the content you are seeing online, and:
- Recognise when online content contains abuse, such as insults, threats, and gendered disinformation.
- Remember that TFGBV can be shared in both written and visual formats.
- Understand that TFGBV targets can include social media users, not just high-profile women, women's rights activists, and individuals supporting gender equality.
- Don't disregard or normalise this content.

REPORT ⚠

- Report the online abuse to the relevant social media platform.
- Report the online abuse to organisations or online communities that could provide support.
- Document it: take screenshots of the content to make it easier to report
- In some cases, the best option might be to block the abuser.
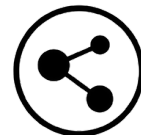
SUPPORT 👥

- Support the individual experiencing online abuse.
- Provide an alternative narrative to bury the harmful content.
- Amplify the original content and expose the myths or reclaim the hashtags.
- Raise awareness of credible voices and platforms.
- Challenge harmful online behaviours.

4. PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY

Social media platforms play a central role in facilitating and disseminating TFGBV. Therefore, they are responsible for ensuring accountability and implementing measures to prevent TFGBV. Platforms can implement several mechanisms to address harmful online behaviour.

TERMS OF SERVICE

Social Media platforms have continued to fail to enforce their policies and terms of service regarding harmful online content. Facebook, X, and Telegram have policies prohibiting gendered abuse on their sites. Despite this, CIR's research has found TFGBV on their sites.

Platforms need to implement and prioritise better business practices influenced by a human rights-based approach. This will increase the safety and transparency of their online spaces and demonstrate accountability.

REPORTING MECHANISMS

Platforms must enhance reporting mechanisms for TFGBV and ensure these are clear and accessible. They should ensure complainants retain their privacy, meaning no personal information is shared when a report is made.
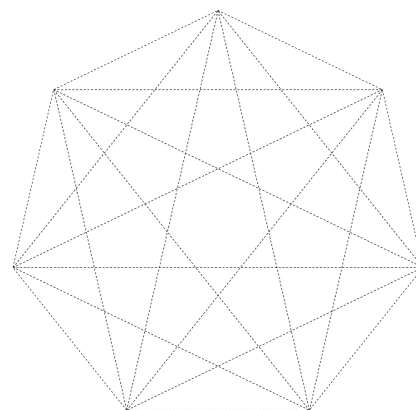
RESPONSE & VISIBILITY

Platforms often fail to respond to cases of TFGBV and, in some instances, suspend survivors' accounts instead of removing the offensive content or holding perpetrators to account. These failures can lead to tragic events, such as the killing of Ethiopian University Professor Meareg Amare after harmful posts targeting him were shared on Facebook.

Social media platforms must be transparent about how TFGBV is being addressed, and what action they are taking to prevent it.

ALGORITHMS

Improvements to algorithms are needed as methods can be used to avoid detection when posting harmful content, e.g. replacing letters with symbols or using images with overlaid text. Platforms must ensure that algorithmic tools do not amplify discriminatory content or discriminate against equity-seeking groups.

CONTENT MODERATION

While many platforms implement content moderation methods to identify and remove abusive content, these measures are not sufficient. The responsibility is placed on TFGBV survivors and individual users to seek accountability. Content moderation is also highly selective and inconsistent across platforms and does not take into account local perspectives which would provide more suitable and context specific monitoring.

Context-specific lexicons should be developed, maintained, and used to identify potentially harmful or inflammatory posts. There is a notable lack of monitoring for low-resource languages, like those spoken in Ethiopia. This study has proven that identifying TFGBV is possible, even with limited resources.

Social media companies should organise or support formal dialogues led by local organisations that monitor hate speech on their platforms. For example, Facebook created an independent oversight board, bringing together technology, human rights, and policy experts to review complex cases of hate speech. These initiatives should be rolled out further,

5. AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS
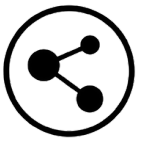
Awareness campaigns can counter gender stereotypes and gender-based discrimination while promoting women's and girls' representation in all public spaces. According to CIR's interviewees, no platform is safe for women. While platforms may be responsible for dissemination and amplification, TFGBV results from attitudes and beliefs, meaning that raising awareness to educate and empower individuals is critical.

COUNTER THE ABUSE

Women and girls can own the abuse by repurposing hashtags being used in harmful content such as #getbackinthekitchen to counter the abuse and disseminate positive and empowering messages. This repurposing can also be used to create strategic communication campaigns to amplify women in high-profile roles and important training and education opportunities.

The #WhatSheWore or #ምንለበሳነበር Exhibition, a collaboration by Setaweet, the Embassy of Sweden, and UN Women showcased clothes worn by rape survivors across Ethiopia at the time of their sexual assault, accompanied by the stories from the survivor themselves.

CAMPAIGNS

Run campaigns with a clear focus. For example, the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" saw countless events across Ethiopia, seeking to raise awareness of women's rights and issues including TFGBV.

"My Space! My Right! My Voice" was a tagline developed by the UN in Ethiopia for a campaign to promote women's right to equal representation and leadership in digital technologies and spaces and their right to be protected from online violence.

BUILD A COMMUNITY OF INFLUENCERS

Change the narrative by buildng a community of influencers to help with content creation and dissemination. Through either informal or formalised networks, link social media influencers, celebrities, athletes, podcasters, and Tiktokers to share and amplify content that breaks down gender stereotypes and promotes anti-GBV views.

EMPOWER MEN TO STAND WITH WOMEN

The fight for gender equality may be led by women and girls, however, it can't be achieved without the engagement and support of men and boys. Their role in creating and maintaining safe digital spaces and challenging harmful online behaviour is critical. Men and boys can be involved in awareness campaigns such as the HeForShe movement for gender equality.

During the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV, the EHRDC event 'Her Talk, Her Walk' gave a platform to passionate speakers, including Shimelis Gebeyehu. He spoke of how women's rights are also a man's struggle.

SPOTLIGHT ON

6. SUPPORT WOMEN AND GIRLS
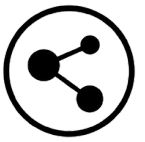
While supporting survivors does not fix the original problem, providing psycho-social support to women and girls, and educating them on ways to protect themselves online, remains vital. Further, creating support networks and a safe mechanism for reporting is essential in combatting TFGBV.

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Create private support networks for survivors of TFGBV or those who are at risk of targeting. Use these networks to create a safe and empowering online environment and to speak out against, and build awareness of, ongoing gendered abuse. Inspiration can be taken from established online support networks like Hollaback!'s HeartMob project and TrollBusters, which have supporters ready to respond to users' reports of online harassment and provide positive counterspeech.

SAFE REPORTING

Create a safe way for women and girls to report TFGBV, communicate their need for support, and share this request with online communities. The reporting system, which could be a data submission portal like the one being developed by Setaweet, should include details such as where the online abuse has occurred (which platform), what type of abuse it is, and what kind of support is needed.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

Mental health support needs to be destigmatised and reviewed with a gendered perspective. Mentoring systems and educational support could be implemented to help women and girls enter the workplace.

DIGITAL SECURITY

While providing digital security training is not a solution to the problem, it does provide additional protection to women and girls when they engage in online spaces. Women and girls, specifically journalists and women human rights defenders would benefit from this training, as digital threats for women are different to men.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

In some cases, including after doxxing, survivors cannot stay in their homes. Organisations like the EHRDC provide support, including rehousing. These services should continue to be funded.
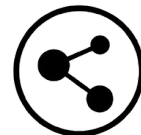
RESOURCES & ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SUPPORT

TOLLFREE HOTLINES

6388: Setaweet (Alegnta)
8044: Marie Stopes. Services in Amharic, Afan Oromo, Somali and Tigrigna.
7711: Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA). Services in Amharic, Afan Oromo and Tigrigna.

7. CONTINUED RESEARCH

When speaking to TFGBV survivors, many cited the lack of data as a critical barrier to activism or action to prevent TFGBV. While this research has sought to fill this gap, it has also identified other avenues for research, several of which are outlined below. Funding should be given to additional research projects so that women and girls can engage in evidence based advocacy.

EXPAND CIR'S RESEARCH TO MORE PLATFORMS

Interviewees told CIR that no platform feels safe. The quantitative study only looked at Facebook, Telegram, and X. Future research could look at additional platforms, including YouTube and TikTok.

BUILD MONITORING SYSTEMS

During CIR's quantitative study, the team annotated over 7000 social media posts. Using annotated data, models can be created which could be trained to detect hate speech. This type of monitoring system could feed into reporting mechanisms.

TFGBV AROUND SPECIFIC EVENTS

Research could investigate how TFGBV changes around specific events, including elections, political protests, religious demonstrations, or conflict

SURVEY MORE SURVIVORS

CIR's qualitative study included in-depth interviews with 14 women who are active in Ethiopian society, from journalists, to human rights activists and social media influencers. A public survey could be created and shared more broadly in order to obtain a wider variety of experiences.

EVALUATE EXISTING LAW AND POLICY

An evaluation of the effectiveness of current laws, policies, and guidance is needed. By identifying gaps or weaknesses, research can strengthen protection for women and girls.

ROLE OF THE DIASPORA

During roundtables and workshops, there was a shared belief that the diaspora play a role in setting the narratives and amplifying content online. This, participants felt, often led to harm, both for women and girls, but also for other identity groups. An investigation could research the role of the diaspora in perpetuating TFGBV versus social media users based in Ethiopia.

REVIEW EXISTING PROJECTS AND FORM ALLIANCES

Through the various discussions with civil society actors in Ethiopia, it is clear that many ongoing projects seek to combat TFGBV. By reviewing the projects that exist, and identifying commonalities, alliances can be made between organisations to share information and increase impact.