

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN THE
GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM'
ACTION COALITION ON



TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY



IPPF_Georgina Goodwin_Burundi

Countdown 2030 Europe (C2030E) is a consortium of European NGOs advocating to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and family planning (FP) in developing countries through holding European governments to account on their international policy and financial commitments on SRHR. To achieve this mission, amongst other activities, the consortium provides inputs to intergovernmental negotiations and policy processes. **This factsheet aims to inform the Action Coalitions on the interlinkages between SRHR and elements of gender equality related to technology and innovation.**

The objective of the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) is to build a new momentum to advance gender equality worldwide. To do so, Action Coalitions must avoid silos and must instead explore synergies between them, complement one another and focus on gender-transformative interventions. This series of factsheets done by Countdown 2030 Europe and IPPF EN aims at building bridges between Action Coalitions to bring about an actual change in the lives of women and girls worldwide and to show how access to SRHR is gender-transformative and is essential to achieve gender equality.



WHY

SHOULD SRHR BE INCLUDED ACTION COALITION ON TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY?

Digitalisation offers amazing opportunities for gender equality, women empowerment and for delivering health and education services around the world. At the same time, ensuring equitable participation in the Internet age creates many challenges, and the stakes are highest for vulnerable and underserved communities, particularly for women and girls. The rise of digitalisation therefore comes with challenges, but also with opportunities in terms of SRHR.

Including SRHR in the Action coalition technology and innovation is necessary to advance gender equality. Gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women will not be possible without the realisation of SRHR. **SRHR are critical for women and girls to have healthy lives, to address violence and power relations in their lives, to be free to participate in social, economic and political life, and to freely make decisions governing their bodies.**

DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCELERATE SRHR



While achieving gender equality is lagging behind and is even facing a reversal of progress due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we need new ideas to accelerate the progress. **With accurate innovations and technology, SRHR could be advanced in new ways**, and new and future technologies would help reach those who were harder to reach before, hence supporting the achievement of Agenda 2030, and leaving no one behind.

Technology can be used as a means for **delivering information and services to people in a simple and accessible manner**. Digital applications have been developed to tackle issues ranging from delivering vital health information to pregnant women, helping to prevent stock-outs in contraceptives, to reporting instances of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and informing women on how to navigate public spaces safely. In many countries, technology can also be a viable alternative to fill in the gap when comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is absent from school curricula.

Building sustainable technologies that enable people to reach information and to seek help for SRHR issues is also vital for resilience in case of a pandemic or similar crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic made clear the importance of leveraging technology and digital tools to guarantee the continued provision of SRH services and e-health. The use of digital solutions started as a temporary solution to the crisis, but has had positive impacts and could become more permanent as a complement to face-to-face services.

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES

Although digitalisation brings many opportunities, it also creates challenges. **Women around the world face unique barriers to fully benefiting from the Internet:** these barriers range from digital skills and education gaps, affordability barriers worsened by income inequality to online harassment and SGBV, and infringements on digital rights.¹ Many of these barriers are the same challenges that are at the root of gender inequalities globally. **To maximise the impact of the digital transformation on gender equality and access to SRHR, it will be important for the Action Coalition to ensure that no one is left behind in terms of accessing technology and innovation, especially women and girls.**

HOW SHOULD SRHR BE INCLUDED IN THE ACTION COALITION ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND RIGHTS?

It is essential to ensure that everyone can equally benefit from new technologies, in particular women and girls, leaving no one behind. Special needs of marginalised and underserved groups, such as women, girls, young people, people with disabilities, LGTBQI+, etc. must be considered when innovating SRHR-related technologies. C2030E believes that the following points must be included in this Action Coalition:

PREVENTING ONLINE HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment and SGBV on the internet and especially on social media increases along with the use of them. This is a serious threat to people's right to privacy, to be free from violence and coercion and to make decisions regarding their own sexuality, gender and body, but also to achieving gender equality. Thus, online SGBV must be included as an issue to be addressed by the action coalition.

Educating young people is an effective and long-term solution to prevent sexual harassment and SGBV. High-quality, age-appropriate, and evidence-based² comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) can help change harmful gender norms, teach how to identify and fight against all forms of sexual harassment and SGBV, especially online, and help the learners describe harassment to an adult or authority. Funding for CSE and commitments to deliver CSE should therefore be included in the action coalition blueprint, and European donors must make individual financial and political commitments in that sense.

USING INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE) AND SRHR INFORMATION



Mobile phones provide cost-effective, efficient, and a highly suitable communication channel for reaching and engaging youth around SRHR issues. Digital tools prove to be effective as they reduce stigma, ensure confidentiality, cut costs and challenges linked to reaching health facilities. Studies have proven that providing SRH information via mobile phones is highly appealing to young people and can positively influence their SRH outcomes including improving knowledge, reducing sexual risk behaviour, and increasing utilisation of health services.³ This makes a strong case for CSE to be included in the Action Coalition on technology and innovation. Once again, financial and political commitments for CSE should therefore be included in the Action Coalition Blueprint as well as in individual commitments made by European donors as part of the Action Coalition.

DEVELOPING REMOTE SRH SERVICES

More and more people around the world are using digital tools to access health services, including on SRHR. It is estimated that some 1.3 billion people used mobile health services in 2018 – an increase of 230 million since the previous year.⁴ People seeking SRH services might face stigma and the local services are not provided confidentially or are not reliable. In addition, in remote areas, access to SRH services is not always possible, due to lack of access to health centres and transport costs. With technology these barriers can be avoided, and more people have access to necessary sexual and reproductive health care services.

The advantages described above make a strong case for SRH services delivery to be included in the Action coalition on innovation and technology as a concrete sector where digitalisation can support gender equality and women's rights. The Action coalition's blueprint should therefore include specific actions on SRH services, including allocating funding for projects using digital technologies to achieve SRHR and promoting measures for SRH service delivery through digital technologies. European donors should therefore include, as part of their engagement in the Action Coalition on technology and innovation, financial and political commitments on the use of digital technologies in favour of SRHR.



GOOD PRACTICES

FROM CSOS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that using digital technologies to deliver CSE and SRH/FP services could help meet people's needs and reach the most marginalised and underserved communities, even in times of crises. Good practices have been implemented in this context, and civil society organisations have found ways to continue delivering SRHR when face-to-face consultations were harder or not possible. For instance, IPPF Member Associations in Burundi and Central African Republic have offered CSE through social media, WhatsApp, or other virtual channels, as well as doorstep delivery of SRH products like contraceptives and pregnancy test kits.⁵ Likewise, FPA Sri Lanka has launched a hotline, called "Happy Life", to give SRH advice and to provide psychological and social support to clients throughout this period. These are concrete examples through which the Action Coalition could support gender equality and SRHR for all.

This factsheet is part of a series of factsheets by Countdown 2030 Europe on the inclusion of SRHR in the various Action Coalition (AC) of the Generation Equality Forum - to ensure an integrated and inclusive approach across the ACs with particular attention to SRHR throughout.

1. World Wide Web Foundation, 2020. Women's Rights Online: Closing the digital gender gap for a more equal world <http://webfoundation.org/docs/2020/10/Womens-Rights-Online-Report-1.pdf>
2. UNESCO, UNFPA, and UN Women presented the revised UN Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education at 'Education for a Healthy Future' <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770>
3. Ippoliti and L'Engle, 2017. Meet us on the phone: mobile phone programs for adolescent sexual and reproductive health in low-to-middle income countries. <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-016-0276-z>
4. <https://www.gsma.com/betterfuture/resources/2019-mobile-industry-report>
5. <https://countdown2030europe.org/resources/how-can-european-union-protect-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-covid-19-times>



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