



Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Tanzania: A Growing Digital Threat

Introduction

In the digital era, the rapid growth and integration of technology into everyday life have brought significant social, political, and economic opportunities. However, this transformation has also introduced new forms of gender-based violence, known as Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

In Tanzania, the rise of digital platforms and increased internet penetration have created new arenas where women and marginalized communities are targeted with abuse, harassment, and disinformation. Despite growing awareness of TFGBV, there is limited legal and institutional protection, and survivors often face stigma, lack of redress mechanisms, and digital exclusion.

Zaina Foundation, a Tanzanian-based non-profit organization dedicated to promoting digital rights and inclusion, has been at the forefront of combating TFGBV.

Through its leadership in the Digital Rights Coalition and collaboration with national and international partners, Zaina Foundation continues to raise awareness, provide capacity building, and advocate for stronger legal frameworks to address this digital threat.

Understanding Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

TFGBV refers to acts of gender-based violence that are committed, abetted, or aggravated by the use of digital technologies such as mobile phones, internet platforms, social media, surveillance tools, and artificial intelligence. These acts include but are not limited to:

- ⊖ Online harassment and trolling
- ⊖ Cyberstalking
- ⊖ Non-consensual sharing of intimate images ("revenge porn")
- ⊖ Doxxing (publishing private or identifying information without consent)

- ⊖ Deepfake pornography
- ⊖ Online threats and blackmail
- ⊖ Hate speech and disinformation campaigns targeting women

In Tanzania, these violations are often directed at women in public life, including journalists, politicians, human rights defenders, and activists. The intent is frequently to silence, shame, and exclude women from digital spaces and decision-making arenas.

TFGBV in the Tanzanian Context

Tanzania has seen a surge in internet users over the past decade, especially among the youth and women. While this increase in access has opened new channels for expression and participation, it has also resulted in heightened risks for online abuse, particularly for women. Many cases go unreported due to stigma, fear of retaliation, or mistrust in law enforcement.

During election periods, the prevalence of TFGBV spikes significantly. Female political candidates and journalists are often subjected to targeted disinformation, manipulated images, and coordinated online attacks designed to undermine their credibility and discourage their participation.

The 2020 general elections, for example, saw several women publicly humiliated through fake scandals circulated on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp.

Furthermore, the lack of digital literacy and cyber hygiene education, particularly among rural and low-income women, exacerbates their vulnerability to TFGBV. Many are unaware of how to protect their privacy online or where to seek help when targeted.

The Role of Zaina Foundation and the Digital Rights Coalition

Zaina Foundation has been instrumental in tackling TFGBV through advocacy, research, digital security training, and coalition building. As a founding member of the Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition, the Foundation has prioritized the following interventions:

1. Capacity Building and Awareness:

Zaina Foundation regularly conducts digital safety workshops for women human rights defenders, activists, and journalists. These trainings include topics such as password protection, secure communication, social media privacy settings, and how to report and document TFGBV incidents.

2. Research and Documentation:

The Foundation undertakes evidence-based research on online gender-based violence to understand patterns, platforms used, and the impact on victims. These findings are used to inform policy advocacy and to generate public awareness.

3. Advocacy for Legal Reform:

Zaina Foundation is engaging with policymakers and regulatory bodies such as TCRA and the Ministry of Information to advocate for specific laws and policies that address TFGBV. While laws like the Cybercrimes Act (2015) and the Personal Data Protection Act (2022) exist, they lack gender-specific provisions that recognize the unique nature of TFGBV.

4. Coalition Mobilization:

Through the Digital Rights Coalition, Zaina Foundation works with other civil society organizations to coordinate responses to TFGBV. This includes public campaigns, petitions, and stakeholder dialogues aimed at pressuring digital platforms and the government to take concrete action.

Challenges in Combating TFGBV

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist:

» **Lack of Legal Recognition:** TFGBV is not explicitly defined in Tanzanian law, making prosecution difficult.

» **Weak Enforcement Mechanisms:** Even when laws are in place, enforcement is inconsistent, and perpetrators often go unpunished.

» **Limited Digital Literacy:** Many women lack the technical know-how to navigate or protect themselves online.

» **Platform Accountability:** Social media companies have limited moderation capabilities in Kiswahili and often fail to remove harmful content reported by users in Tanzania.

» **Cultural Stigma:** Victims of TFGBV are frequently blamed or shamed, discouraging them from speaking out.

The Way Forward

Addressing TFGBV requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach. Zaina Foundation and its partners recommend the following:

» **Enact Gender-Specific Digital Safety Laws:** Develop and enforce legislation that explicitly addresses TFGBV and includes strong protective and remedial measures.

» **Increase Awareness Campaigns:** Use radio, social media, and community-based platforms to educate the public about TFGBV and digital rights.

» **Enhance Digital Security Programs:** Integrate cyber hygiene education into school curriculums and adult learning initiatives.

» **Strengthen Reporting Mechanisms:** Establish user-friendly and anonymous reporting platforms for TFGBV victims.

» **Hold Platforms Accountable:** Advocate for localized content moderation policies and Kiswahili-language support on social media platforms.

» **Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** Bring together government, civil society, tech companies, and communities to create a safer digital environment.

Conclusion

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence is a pressing and growing issue in Tanzania that threatens the gains made in gender equality and digital inclusion. As more women engage in public discourse and utilize digital platforms, the risk of online abuse intensifies, undermining their rights and silencing critical voices.

Through the leadership of organizations like Zaina Foundation and the support of the Digital Rights Coalition, meaningful strides are being made to confront TFGBV. However, continued vigilance, advocacy, and solidarity are needed to ensure that Tanzania's digital future is safe, inclusive, and equitable for all. Only by recognizing TFGBV as a serious human rights issue can we begin to dismantle the digital barriers that hold women and marginalized groups back.

Author:

