

Summary Report: Final Evaluation: Caught in the Web: Tackling Gendered Drivers of Conflict and Exclusion in Cyberspace - CITW

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Context

Gendered Online Hate Speech (GOHS) and Cyber Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (CSGBV) have emerged as significant issues in Sri Lanka and legitimacy and violence are significantly involved themes in this regard. The lack of robust regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms in Sri Lanka's digital sphere has allowed hate speech and gender-based violence to thrive online, particularly against women and marginalized groups, often with impunity. Physical and psychological violence such as online harassment, threats and non-consensual sharing of private information, has become another critical aspect of GOHS and CSGBV in Sri Lanka. Hence, this project aims to focus on advocacy for stronger regulatory frameworks, capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement agencies to tackle online violence effectively and raising awareness among the public about digital safety and respectful online behavior.

PROGRAMMATIC APPROACHES

- The project developed a robust monitoring system on gendered online hate speech and cyber-SGBV in order to provide evidence-based learnings to inform and promote responses among other actors.
- The workshops and awareness programs conducted for the members of the civil society and state institutions aimed to increase their capacity to implement or scale up existing responses effectively for gendered online hate speech and cyber-SGBV to provide better support towards affected groups.
- The advocacy meetings and campaigns conducted among policy makers in Sri Lanka and Big Tech who play a key role within the social media platforms aimed to Influence and advocate them, drawing on the evidence and learnings built through the project in order to promote positive action which tackles GOHS and CSGBV.
- The consultative workshops conducted for the youth, LGBTQIA and women in local government focused on challenging and improving the existing knowledge and capacity of users to create and utilize safe, respectful, and inclusive cyberspaces.

WHY THIS IS MEANT TO CREATE CHANGE

These victim focused approaches aimed at strengthening the existing legal framework on GOHS and CSGBV in Sri Lanka and through increasing capacity of these first respondents (police, government officials) it is intended to better serve the victims of GOHS and CSGBV particularly women and marginalized groups in the society. The monitoring system that enhanced providing evidence-based learnings also contributes to this. Hence, overall, these approaches aimed to advance effective responses to gendered online hate speech and cyber-GBV in Sri Lanka.

About the study

The goal of this study was to evaluate the project through relevant OECD-DAC criteria - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and the intermediate impact, to extract lessons learnt from the project and to develop five 'cases of change'.

METHODOLOGY

The team collected several primary and secondary data, involving a survey with 265 respondents, 19 key informant interviews with representatives from project implementers and national level stakeholders, and 15 focus group discussions from the Sri Lankan Police, CSO's working for the upliftment of women and youth.

REPRESENTATION

The survey reached a total of 265 respondents from diverse groups: Youth, LGBTQI, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Police, mental health service providers, lawyers, and other first responders and Local Government Officials in the targeted provinces; Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Kilinochchi, Kurunegala, and Jaffna. Respondents included 35% of men and 65% of women.

Key Results

OUR APPROACH TO MEASURING CHANGE

This project focuses on Violence, Legitimacy and Agency, Impact in these areas is measured in relation to the OECD-DAC criteria.

Build robust evidence and monitoring around “what works” for tackling gendered online hate speech and cyber-SGBV, current gaps, and potential early warning indicators to inform and promote responses of other actors.

PEACE IMPACT FRAMEWORK
Violence
Polarization
Legitimacy
Investments
Agency

Influence and advocate with policy makers within the country as well as with Big Tech who play a key role within the social media space, drawing on the evidence and learnings built through the project in order to promote positive action which tackles GOHS and CSGBV.

Intended Positive Outcome	Related Results
Increased capacity among participants, especially law enforcement officers, leading to improved identification and response to cyber-SGBV and GOHS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 95% of survey respondents reported their responses and action taking for CSGBV cases have improved. → 80% respondents indicated that their confidence levels in handling online violence and gender issues have improved. → 77% of the respondents stated that they received more positive feedback from victims on their services
Evidence based monitoring system is effective for promoting and informing responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 60% of participating stakeholders report that evidence-based products support them to effectively address GOHS and CSGBV. → 80% of stakeholders admitted that they use evidence products to identify the prevalence and trend of GOHS and CSGBV and improve response to GOHS and CSGBV.
The project has been effective in improving responses, knowledge, capacity, confidence levels, and actions related to creating safe, respectful, and inclusive cyberspaces and addressing gendered online hate speech and cyber SGBV.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 76% participants acknowledged that the project contributed to improve existing knowledge and capacity of users.
Negative outcome influence on policy changes or improvements to the existing policies related to GOHS and CSGBV is minimum and Big Tech is minimum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 10% of policy makers and Big Tech personnels interviewed could report with examples of actions/measures taken to improve the response mechanism for GOHS and CSGBV based on lessons learned and best practices → KIIs participants mentioned the difficulties of contacting the Big Tech and convincing them and persuading policy makers to make required policy changes.

¹ More on the Peace Impact Framework can be found [her](#)

INCLUSION & PARTICIPATION

One of the significant groups participated were representatives from LGBTQI community. As they are unable to openly participate in these kinds of projects due to the conservative culture of the Sri Lankan society, they actively participated and share their experiences during the project. Members of the Police were another significant group that participated in the project as they rarely participate in these kinds of projects despite their high relevance to them and the government bureaucracy also hinders them in participating.

Feedback:

"I strongly believe that any initiative must be holistic. Because when you are taking a strategy to implement the project, you cannot just tackle it targeting one specific group of people or purely doing advocacy on the subject. It must include advocacy, capacity building, and awareness raising. We contributed in a holistic way to improve the response mechanism."
KII No 01

"I am fully satisfied with the program. I appreciated the solidarity, motivation, and substantial assistance I received, which greatly enhanced my learning experience. Additionally, I have some suggestions to further improve the program ensuring high-quality materials and providing updated information would be beneficial." (FGD, CSO/Jaffna).

Conclusion

The evidence-based monitoring system is a success as it has been successfully used by the intended participants enabling them to inform and improve their responses. The capacity of the civil society members, especially the LGBTQI, the CSO and the Police is significantly increased enabling them to effectively respond to related issues. This project that focused on advancing effective responses to gendered online hate speech and cyber-GBV in Sri Lanka based on a victim-based approach has been able to effectively tackle Gender-Based Online Hate Speech (GOHS) and Cyber Sexual Gender-Based Violence (CSGBV).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **To formalize Exit Strategies**
 - To develop clear exit strategies to ensure sustainability and long-term impact post-project completion.
2. **To enhance Stakeholder Feedback Loops**
 - To implement robust feedback mechanisms to continuously assess stakeholder needs, improve project delivery, and address evolving challenges.
3. **To evolve Digital Literacy Programs**
 - Develop and implement evolving digital literacy and online safety programs tailored to different target demographics, with a particular focus on younger age groups.
4. **To Foster Multi-Level Capacity Building:**
 - Continue capacity-building initiatives at various levels, including grassroots, community, institutional, and policy levels, to ensure comprehensive responses to gender-based violence and hate speech.