



RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

Increasing and Strengthening the Availability of Digital Sexual and Reproductive Health Services with Youth-Friendly Approaches



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEDAW Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women

CESCR Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural
Rights

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 2019

CSO Civil Society Organization

DHI Digital Health Intervention

LGBTQIA+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex,
Asexual

MEL Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

SMS Short Message Service

SRH Sexual and Reproductive Health

SRHR Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

STI Sexually Transmitted Infection

UN United Nations

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UNFPA United Nations Population Fund

UX User Experience

UI User Interface

WHO World Health Organization

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are recognized as fundamental human rights by The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In today's rapidly evolving healthcare landscape, addressing the SRH needs of young people has taken on newfound significance. With the growing ubiquity of digital technology and the imperative to offer services that resonate with youth, the goal of enhancing the availability of digital SRH services while adopting youth-friendly approaches has emerged as a pivotal response to an array of pressing challenges.

Digital technologies play a key role in addressing SRHR needs, especially among younger populations.¹ In particular, **Digital Health Interventions (DHIs)** hold significant promise in providing comprehensive SRHR and ensuring that young

people receive the information and care they need.² The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption and implementation of digital health solutions, bringing forth an unparalleled urgency to revolutionize healthcare delivery.³ The global crisis exposed vulnerabilities in traditional healthcare systems, prompting a rapid shift towards digital platforms to ensure continuity of care while minimizing physical contact.⁴ Telemedicine, remote patient monitoring, and digital health applications have emerged as essential tools in mitigating the spread of the virus and managing healthcare services amidst lockdowns and social distancing measures.⁵ Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted disparities in access to healthcare, underscoring the importance of digital solutions in reaching marginalized populations and remote areas.⁶ As a result, stakeholders across the healthcare spectrum are increasingly recognizing the imperative to invest in and scale up digital

1 WHO, 2023

2 Starrs et al., 2018

3 Khilnani, Schulz & Robinson, 2020

4 Beaunoyer, Dupéré & Guitton, 2020

5 OECD, 2023

6 Ohannessian, Duong & Odone, 2020

health innovations to build resilient healthcare systems capable of addressing current and future public health challenges.⁷

This report concludes nine months of extensive work aimed at improving comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and fulfilling the sexual and reproductive rights of youth, particularly adolescent girls. The project focused on analyzing various strategies and methodologies for **applying youth-friendly approaches to delivering SRH services digitally**.⁸ The work included a comprehensive literature review, an assessment of DHIs within the Fòs Feminista Alliance, and five case studies of DHIs supported by Fòs Feminista from organizations based in the Global South. The insights, findings, and lessons learned from these activities have informed the recommendations presented in this report.

Digital Health Interventions (DHIs) that adopt youth friendly approaches hold significant promise in providing comprehensive SRHR and ensuring that young people receive the information and care they need.

⁷ Fagherazzi et al., 2020

⁸ While this project primarily focused on analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of digital versus face-to-face service delivery, it also considered the integration of services combining both digital and face-to-face components.



Chapter 2.

Key Recommendations to Enhance Youth-Friendly Digital Sexual and Reproductive Health Services





1. Understand the Digital Ecosystem for Feasibility and Effectiveness



2. Adopt Hybrid Approaches that Strengthen the Digital Ecosystem



3. Aim for Sustainability Through Financial and MEL Actions



4. Prioritize Privacy and Digital Security to Protect Young Users



5. Use Clear, Inclusive and Non-Judgemental Language to Build Trust



6. Foster Meaningful Youth Engagement at Every Step



7. Embrace Intersectionality Towards Equitable Access



8. Contextualize Intersectional Approaches Through Collaboration



9. Contribute to Making the Digital Ecosystem More Intersectional



1 Understand the Digital Ecosystem for Feasibility and Effectiveness

Recommendation: Understand the digital ecosystem of the target country or region to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of a digital-based approach for advancing youth's SRHR, identify enablers and obstacles, and ensure that knowledge about the ecosystem is current to facilitate evidence-based improvements.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s); Target population(s); Government agencies (e.g., national statistical offices, Health and Technology Ministries); Third party institutions (e.g., telecommunications companies, universities, NGOs, or CSOs working on digital literacy or similar initiatives); Donors.

Rationale: A country or region's digital ecosystem is composed of stakeholders, systems, enabling environment, including the culture and social norms, the political and economic landscapes, and technology infrastructure available.⁹ All these factors can impact a person's capacity to access and use technology. Therefore, performing a comprehensive assessment to understand the digital ecosystem "can help determine if and how" to engage with youth using digital tools.¹⁰ This step should ideally be taken before implementing a DHI, as it may reveal that a digital-based approach is not suitable. However, because these ecosystems are ever-changing, conducting this assessment at any stage can provide valuable insights on how to leverage the digital ecosystem to achieve the DHI's objectives, ensure the intervention reaches the broadest intended audience effectively, and allow for evidence-based improvements. Even well-designed DHIs may require updates to adapt to shifts in user behavior, advancements in digital technologies, or changes in preferred platforms.

WHO's principle of equity calls for "ensuring fair and impartial access to digital health interventions".¹¹ Therefore, this type of assessment should consider existing disparities in digital technology access due to socioeconomic status, gender, disabilities, and geographic location (rural vs. urban), as well as the digital tools most preferred and frequently used by the target group (e.g., mobile apps, phone lines, desktops).

Conducting a full assessment requires time and effort. However, it is often possible to leverage existing evidence (e.g., data on Internet access, mobile Internet, or gender digital divide) and organizational networks to gain valuable insights into which SRHR gaps can and should be filled through digital-based approaches. During our case study analysis, we found that some organizations gathered insights from or consulted with comparable initiatives during the design and planning stages, identifying obstacles (e.g., potential legal barriers) and solutions before implementation (e.g., conducting digital literacy training among youth with limited digital skills to ensure and improve DHI's usability). Additionally, various available templates can facilitate the assessment process, such as the guiding questions provided in WHO's "Youth-centred digital health interventions" framework and UNICEF's "Designing Digital Interventions for Lasting Impact" toolkit.

⁹ USAID, n.d.; Principles for Digital Development, 2024

¹⁰ Principles for Digital Development, 2024

¹¹ WHO, 2020

2 Adopt Hybrid Approaches that Strengthen the Digital Ecosystem

Recommendation: Adopt comprehensive or hybrid approaches, leveraging both digital and in-person methods, to expand access to and reach of SRHR services for young people.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s); Target population(s); Government agencies (e.g., national statistical offices, Health and Technology Ministries); Third party institutions (e.g., telecommunications companies, universities, NGOs, or CSOs working on digital literacy or similar initiatives); Donors.



Rationale: During the design stage of a DHI, it is crucial to evaluate whether a digital approach is appropriate within the given context and to consider the best channels and methods to serve the intended young audience. While digital technologies for addressing youth's SRHR have garnered significant attention in recent years,¹² combining these with in-person approaches can markedly enhance service reach, accessibility, tracking, dissemination, and even users' safety. Case studies conducted in low- and middle-income countries revealed that most DHIs used a mix of digital tools (e.g., telemedicine, social media, and SMS) alongside in-person services. For instance, a medical abortion helpline instituted an in-person accompaniment protocol for young girls, which is encouraged but not required for older users.

If digital technologies are deemed the most sensible pathway for offering SRHR services, it is essential to design engaging user experiences (UX) and user interfaces (UI) and implement maintenance processes to minimize technical issues (e.g., platform downtime) to prevent losing users. DHIs should also assess which digital tools can complement service provision to increase effectiveness, such as incorporating interactive features like quizzes, polls, games, comics, discussion forums, and real-time chat functions to encourage active participation and create a dynamic and inclusive digital environment. Gamified learning platforms have been proven effective in improving sexual health literacy and promoting healthier sexual practices.

However, keep in mind that it is always better to leverage existing digital resources that strengthen the current SRHR digital ecosystem on which the DHI is operating. There is no need to reinvent the wheel or seek innovation for its own sake. Greater impact is achieved when information, insights, strategies, and resources are shared across regions, areas of work, and organizations.¹³ Most of the DHIs analyzed used common and widely accessible tools such as social media messaging services, online calls, text messages, and videos to effectively reach youth.

¹² Whitehead et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2022

¹³ Principles for Digital Development, 2024

3 Aim for Sustainability Through Financial and MEL Actions

Recommendation: New and existing DHIs should adopt a long-term mindset and implement activities that foster sustainability. To achieve this, focus on two key areas: 1) financial planning, and 2) monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL).

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s); Target population(s); Third party institutions (e.g. researchers carrying out assessments of digital health strategies or other effectiveness-related studies; partners supporting operations or service provision; networks providing capacity-strengthening on digital literacy or youth-friendly approaches; Donors.

Rationale: Sustainability in digital development is not about making services or interventions “last forever,” but about using resources efficiently and designing for long-term operations that bring value to users.¹⁴ Financial sustainability requires considering long-term costs of DHI implementation (e.g., technology maintenance, operations, training) in addition to initial development costs. It also involves crafting a funding model that specifies revenue systems to sustain these costs. Most case studies revealed a donor-based model, but many organizations faced uncertainty and low financial stability. A creative approach is needed to adopt different strategies, such as intersectional partnerships and social enterprise models. Telehealth initiatives, like paid online consultations with accessible pricing, represent a good example of income-generating models.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) mechanisms enhance sustainability by focusing on the continuous improvement of the DHI. These mechanisms should track service delivery results, especially in terms of accessibility and usability; measure effectiveness in achieving key goals (e.g., providing safe medical contraceptive and abortion counseling); and systematize continuous learning by integrating users’ feedback, assessing previous experiences, and continuously engaging in training and capacity-building activities to keep updated about the digital ecosystem and youth-friendly approaches. It is particularly important to actively and systematically gather feedback from young users with an intersectional perspective that allows the DHI to introduce changes that serve different subgroups.

MEL mechanisms can take various forms, such as monitoring Google Reviews and social media platforms, tracking the number of calls to a helpline, conducting online surveys and quizzes after online consultations, including feedback questions during helpline interactions with users, or engaging in third-party evaluations. Key aspects that should be continually assessed include the overall technical functionality of the DHI, effective user interaction (UX) and user-friendly design, use of non-judgmental and clear language, youth-friendly staff capabilities, and the appropriateness of intersectionality and participatory approaches. Resources like WHO’s “Monitoring and Evaluating Digital Health Interventions” provide valuable guidance for organizations to effectively integrate MEL systems.¹⁵

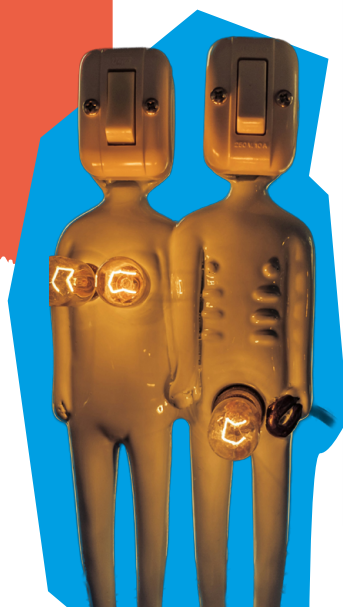
¹⁴ Principles for Digital Development, 2024

¹⁵ WHO, 2016

4 Prioritize Privacy and Digital Security to Protect Young Users

Recommendation: Uphold confidentiality and privacy by protecting young users' data and integrating digital security protocols to avoid any potential harm to children and adolescents, and build a trusted, safe environment for accessing digital SRHR services.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s); Target population(s); Service delivery partners; Parents, tutors or guardians; Digital security and privacy experts, including legal and compliance officers; Companies providing services used by DHIs.



Rationale: Social stigma surrounding sexual activity among youth can lead to physical and emotional abuse, as well as legal, economic, and social repercussions.¹⁶ Therefore, enacting digital security protocols to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of young users must be a cornerstone of any DHI. The ultimate goal is to prevent harm to young people, guided by ethical principles, and build a trusted, safe environment for accessing digital SRHR services.

Digital security strategies involve developing robust safety protocols throughout the planning, development, and implementation stages of DHIs.¹⁷ Some strategies are technically complex, such as integrating firewalls to protect digital systems from cyberattacks (e.g., malware) and ensuring user communication is encrypted to prevent data breaches and privacy violations. Other strategies are equally important. These include allowing the use of pseudonyms in digital platforms, setting appropriate timeframes for deleting sensitive data, and restricting access to personal information to designated personnel.

Data ownership must also be carefully considered. Implementing organizations should avoid using existing digital platforms that do not protect personal information (e.g., social media platforms like Facebook/Meta, Instagram) to provide SRHR services or collect Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Additionally, they should refrain from using platforms that sell users' data for monetization or expose it to unauthorized parties.

Finally, a clearly communicated data management policy can further serve to reinforce user safety and privacy assurances, thereby building trust and transparency in the DHI's operations. Regular audits and reviews of these practices are essential to ensure the ongoing effectiveness and compliance of these measures.

¹⁶ WHO, 2020

¹⁷ WHO, 2020

5 Use Clear, Inclusive and Non-Judgemental Language to Build Trust

Recommendation: Ensure that all communication with young users, whether through digital channels or in-person, is clear, inclusive, and free of judgment. This will encourage openness and build trust, which are essential components of SRHR services.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s), particularly staff interacting with youth and content creators; Target population(s); Service delivery partners.

Rationale: Using youth-friendly language is essential to connect with young users, increasing the likelihood of uptake, active participation, and effectiveness of DHIs and SRHR services in general.¹⁸ Defining “youth-friendly language” can be challenging as it needs to adapt to the DHI’s context. However, there are key characteristics that serve as positive guidelines.

Firstly, the language used across platforms and during live interactions with young target populations should be clear and approachable. Avoiding SRHR and other technical jargon and lengthy content will make communication more straightforward and relatable. For example, using direct terminology like “abortion” instead of “voluntary interruption of pregnancy” is more effective.

Secondly, the language should be inclusive, non-discriminatory, and accessible. This means considering young users’ differences and preferences to ensure everyone can engage with the intervention, especially when using digital technologies. This may involve using gender-neutral language or making a mobile application accessible to users with hearing or visual impairments. Consider intersectionality as well. For instance, if the target audience includes young Indigenous girls, the DHI could develop content in their language.

Finally, the language should be free of judgment, particularly regarding SRHR issues. Empathetic, friendly, and normalizing attitudes further encourage openness and build trust.¹⁹ One of the case study organizations highlighted that to communicate with women, especially young girls, they deliberately use a “free of prejudice” approach to destigmatize abortion.

¹⁸ O’Malley, Horowitz, & Burke, 2020; Robards et al., 2018

¹⁹ Robards et al., 2018

6 Foster Meaningful Youth Engagement at Every Step

Recommendation: Involve the youth target population(s) into decision-making processes for the design, development, and implementation of DHIs.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s), especially leadership and staff involved in related activities; Target population(s); Service delivery partners.



Rationale: Designing spaces for meaningful youth engagement through participatory approaches offers several advantages to DHIs. It aligns the intervention with young people's unique experiences, values, and beliefs; promotes increased accessibility and usability by identifying barriers and enablers; and provides invaluable insights into language, literacy levels, intersectionality, and technological access.²⁰ At every stage of a DHI's development, these spaces can become catalysts for co-creating SRHR solutions that are relevant, inclusive, and effective, while also empowering the target audience by addressing their diverse needs. Integrating youth perspectives and ensuring their contributions actively feed into decision-making processes will enhance and improve every other recommendation outlined in this document.

DHIs that meaningfully involve the young target population(s) tend to excel in achieving their SRH service delivery goals. This success is largely attributed to enhanced communication and co-design opportunities with young users. Despite potential financial and geographical limitations to invite users into these processes, organizations can effectively engage them through digital tools, while also creating a sense of safety, understanding, and trust.

Strategies that foster meaningful youth engagement leverage participatory, inclusive and intersectional approaches. Some examples include: forming a team of young users from diverse subgroups to co-design the DHI prior to implementation; creating a board of young members that periodically provide feedback and drive digital initiatives; hiring young staff and training current employees to adopt youth-friendly approaches; consistently incorporating feedback from young users to make tangible changes; ensuring young people from LGBTQIA+ communities, with disabilities and from other target groups are represented in these processes.

20 Hubert et al., 2021; Duarte-Anselmi et al. 2022; Santana, 2023

7 Embrace Intersectionality Towards Equitable Access

Recommendation: Leverage intersectional approaches to integrate the perspectives and address the needs of different groups within the target youth population at all stages of the DHI—planning, development, and implementation.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s); Target population(s); Service delivery partners; Government agencies; Digital technologies companies/providers; Academic community; Capacity-building and capacity-strengthening partners or networks.

Rationale: Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how various aspects of a person's social and political identities—such as gender, race, class, age, sexuality, geographic location, disabilities, and migration or refugee status—interact and contribute to unique experiences of oppression and vulnerability.²¹ These factors shape SRH experiences and needs among youth, yet intersectionality is sometimes overlooked by DHIs.²² Applying an intersectional perspective to the planning, development, and implementation of DHIs targeting youth requires recognizing existing structural inequalities impacting this population and developing tailored strategies to address the needs of marginalized youth within the context of interest. For example, if the goal is to reach “urban adolescents,” intersectional approaches can enable the DHI to reach Indigenous girls and boys living in the city, youth with disabilities, and those within the LGBTQIA+ community. Every recommendation in this section can be enhanced by incorporating an intersectional perspective to ensure no one is left behind (parallelly considering the next recommendation).

Examples of intersectional practices include: i) Creating youth boards that represent diverse populations within the context; ii) Employing outreach and dissemination strategies targeting marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as posting helpline contact information along migrant routes; iii) Using gender-inclusive language in all communications and platforms; iv) Providing services and developing digital resources in Indigenous languages prevalent in the DHI's area; v) Adapting digital tools to be accessible to people with disabilities; vi) Implementing digital literacy training for young populations in rural areas or where these skills need to be strengthened.

²¹ Carastathis, 2014

²² Gesselman, Druet & Vitzthum, 2020

8 Contextualize Intersectional Approaches Through Collaboration

Recommendation: Conduct a social and political assessment of the power dynamics and vulnerability factors affecting young people's SRHR experiences and needs within the specific context of interest. This will ensure the DHI effectively serves the needs of the most vulnerable target populations.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s); Target population(s); Service delivery partners; Government agencies; Digital technologies companies/providers; Academic community; Capacity-building and capacity-strengthening partners or networks.

Rationale: Intersectional approaches must be contextualized, meaning attention should be paid to the historical, political, economic, and social factors that shape power relationships and social structures locally.²³ These factors will likely differ from those experienced by youth in other locations where similar DHIs have been effective, impacting their SRHR experiences and needs. Not all intersectional aspects—such as gender, race, class, age, sexuality, geographic location, disabilities, migration or refugee status—need to be addressed by DHIs targeting youth. Conducting a careful assessment of local vulnerabilities will allow the DHI's services and intersectional approaches to be tailored accordingly. Intersectionality must therefore be driven by a localized analysis to develop contextually relevant strategies. For example, if the goal is to be inclusive of gender-diverse youth, critical thinking must be employed to evaluate how, when, and where intersectional practices are required and appropriate.

Collaboration with local partners, organizational networks, academic institutions, and government agencies can provide valuable insights and resources. Such collaboration can help identify the most critical SRHR-related needs among youth, the current gaps in addressing those needs, and the ideal strategies to fill those gaps.

23 McKinzie & Richards, 2019



9 Contribute to Making the Digital Ecosystem More Intersectional

Recommendation: Integrate intersectional approaches to improve the SRHR local digital ecosystem, ensuring that digital SRHR interventions are inclusive and accessible to the target population, particularly the most vulnerable youth.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s); Target population(s); Service delivery partners; Government agencies; Digital technologies companies/providers; Academic community; Capacity-building and capacity-strengthening partners or networks.

Rationale: As noted in the recommendations under the “Digital Maturity” section, DHIs employ digital technologies to serve youth’s unaddressed needs and gaps SRHR services by leveraging tools and resources that make the most sense given the existing digital ecosystem. In this way, new or ongoing DHIs contribute to strengthen this ecosystem. In this recommendation, the goal is merely to emphasize how crucial is to embedded intersectionality into understanding the digital ecosystem, choosing how best to adopt hybrid digital and in-person approaches for service delivery, and ultimately developing a sustainable DHI.

Critical and creative thinking can help to come up with useful strategies by asking questions such as: Which groups within the target population or needs are not being addressed by other DHIs? How the digital technologies we are using or planning to develop serve the most vulnerable youth? In what ways our fundraising strategy could adopt an intersectional lens? Which MEL mechanisms require or are currently missing intersectional approaches?

Chapter 3.

Implementation Plan



Roadmap for Implementing Recommendations

The successful implementation of the recommendations outlined in this report depend on the resources at the organization's disposal and the specific context of the DHI. While the recommendations aim for broad applicability, any implementation strategy should prioritize three key objectives: fostering **participation**, embracing **intersectionality**, and setting clear, **goal-oriented** targets. The roadmap for implementing recommendations is presented with a rationale, specific considerations for success, and possible stakeholders involved.



1. Participation is Key!



2. Be Intersectional!



3. Plan for Scale and Sustainability!

1 Participation is Key! 🖐️

Rationale: It's crucial to maintain continuous engagement with the target population throughout and beyond the implementation phase. As elaborated in the following section, active involvement of the target demographics is pivotal for the success of a DHI, and this principle should extend to the implementation of recommendations.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s), especially their leadership; Service delivery partners; Target population, including young users from diverse backgrounds; Research consultants; UX consultants.

Implementation Considerations:

1. **User Testing.** If a particular recommendation aligns with your organization's goals, utilize user testing to foster stakeholder participation in implementing proposed adjustments. The feedback received can help tailor implementation strategies to meet the needs of your end users.
2. **Qualitative Research.** Conduct qualitative research, including KIIs, focus group discussions, and surveys, with end-users to test the functionality of implemented recommendations. Even well-tested and thoughtfully crafted recommendations may need fine-tuning after implementation. This research helps evaluate their effectiveness and identify areas for further improvement.
3. **Incorporate Feedback.** When feedback is received, ensure that it is incorporated into the DHI whenever possible. Adaptability to changing circumstances or the needs of target populations is crucial to the long-term success of DHIs.



2 Be Intersectional!

Rationale: As emphasized throughout this report, it is crucial to ensure that DHIs address the needs of marginalized populations, particularly those affected by multiple compounding factors of inequality. Additionally, efforts should be made to effectively reach individuals requiring special accommodations, such as those living with disabilities. Intersectionality should be integrated into all phases of DHI development, and the implementation of recommendations provides another opportunity to reinforce this approach.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s), especially their leadership; Service delivery partners; Target population, including young users from diverse backgrounds; Experts and/or partner organizations working in various aspects of intersectional inclusion.

Implementation Considerations:

4. **Meaningfully Engage Marginalized Communities in Context.** Draw from partners' local expertise to engage local population to assess on an ongoing basis how well the DHI accounts for the needs of diverse groups at the intersection of structures of discrimination and oppression in the local context, including but not limited to **socioeconomically disadvantaged** groups, **gender-diverse** individuals, and those with **disabilities**. Of particular importance is disability inclusion, as reaching disabled populations may necessitate adaptations such as **multimodal** communication methods.²⁴ This focus on engagement should also factor into MEL and feedback strategies, which should also evaluate the DHI's reach and impact on marginalized communities.
5. **Localize Intersectional Approaches.** When adapting DHIs to meet the highly contextualized needs of populations in situations of vulnerability, it may be beneficial to prioritize the main factors of inequity and discrimination in the local context.
6. **Stay Informed.** As the landscape of **technological advancements** and **linguistic trends** is constantly evolving, staying abreast of these advances can ensure the DHI remains accessible through an intersectional lens. Technological innovations increasingly facilitate access to digital services for individuals with disabilities, underscoring the importance of staying abreast of such developments. Additionally, intersectional language is continually evolving, emphasizing the need to incorporate current vocabulary and terminology into the DHI to maintain relevance and inclusivity.²⁵

²⁴ Blechschmidt, 2021

²⁵ Levon, 2015

3 Plan for Scale and Sustainability!

Rationale: Technological components, such as DHIs, can play a role in achieving organizational goals and advancing your mission.²⁶ Subsequently, it's vital to assess whether a recommendation aligns with your organizational objectives before implementation.

Stakeholder(s) Involved: DHI implementing organization(s), especially their leadership; Service delivery partners; Target population, including young users from diverse backgrounds; Internal technical teams and/or outside data privacy and security consultants.

26 National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2005.

Implementation Considerations:

- 7. Prioritize Recommendations.** As you might not be able to implement all recommendations immediately, prioritize those that best align with your mission. For instance, if broadening your audience is a goal, focus on recommendations concerning enhanced outreach strategies.
- 8. Consider Resources.** When implementing any new component to your DHI, ensure you have the internal technical expertise to implement them ethically and maintain privacy standards. This is especially important for recommendations that involve the handling, collection or analysis of sensitive information.
- 9. Sustainable and Scalable.** It is critical to plan for sustainability and scalability beyond the pilot stage, ensuring that the DHI is used to enhance health and rights rather than becoming a temporary, “flash-in-the-pan” solution. DHIs must be continuously resourced and improved to have a lasting impact. From the outset, DHIs should be purposely developed with scale and sustainability in mind to achieve their aims.



Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines

MEL of DHIs is essential for ensuring they meet quality standards, user-friendliness, and desired outcomes.²⁷ It is also required to understand and demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of DHIs for SRHR, an area that currently has a dearth of evidence. In this report, we've presented innovative strategies to complement your organization's existing MEL framework. These recommendations are designed to be broadly applicable, aiding in assessing the current status of DHIs and identifying areas for improvement. They focus on implementing **feedback mechanisms**, enhancing **data collection**, and **assessing** DHI **users' access** to **health services**.

Feedback from DHI users serves as a crucial source of information on the intervention's quality and effectiveness, as well as for identifying areas of improvement.²⁸ One particularly useful feedback mechanism for monitoring DHIs we identified is **user satisfaction surveys**. These surveys offer users an opportunity to express their overall impressions of the DHI, contributing to participatory design by directly engaging with the end-users. Moreover, they provide valuable insights into the

intervention's functionality. These mechanisms are adaptable to any DHI modality, whether it involves a phone line, e-learning course, or online application.

Data collection is another vital component of effective MEL systems. It is through data that initiatives (of any kind) can measure progress, evaluate the impact of activities, identify issues for attention, and ultimately ensure project success.²⁹ Our report highlights various useful data points that a DHI can collect, including **user characteristics**, **geographic location**, and **how the DHI was discovered**. Each of these data points serves unique functions. By understanding the demographics of DHI users, organizations can tailor services to meet their needs more effectively. Geographical data can inform planning, especially if disparities in DHI access across regions are identified, indicating potential barriers. Additionally, insights into how users learn about the DHI can inform outreach strategies. However, given the sensitive nature of the issues addressed by DHIs, safeguarding data privacy is crucial. Our report also provides effective strategies for ensuring privacy,



²⁷ WHO, 2016
²⁸ Erku et al., 2016
²⁹ EvalCommunity, 2024

such as employing pseudonyms or not collecting personal identifiers and segmenting sensitive data.

Evaluating access to services recommended by the DHI is another valuable aspect of monitoring and evaluation, where applicable. Some of the DHIs examined in this study facilitate connections to healthcare providers for further treatment options. Establishing a monitoring linkage with these providers can yield valuable insights into whether users are accessing these necessary services. While DHIs serve various purposes, including providing information and counseling, certain cases (such as STIs, abortion access, etc.) may require in-person consultations with healthcare providers. If DHIs have a network of trusted providers to whom they refer users, establishing connections with these providers can serve as a mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of referrals. If a significant proportion of referrals are not progressing to treatment, this may signal the need to address additional barriers hindering access.

Lastly, use MEL **to generate evidence on whether the DHI is meeting the intended goals** set for end users. Start by establishing clear goals and a vision for the DHI, including its long-term impacts on overall health outcomes for specific communities or groups. **A theory of change** can help define these intended outcomes, and utilizing the aforementioned methods can effectively measure these impacts. Additionally, consider impacts beyond immediate data points (e.g., annual

access) to ensure the DHI is genuinely benefiting the targeted community. Integrating additional data sources relevant to your DHI's focus, such as rates of STIs or unplanned pregnancies, can also aid in monitoring broader changes.



Chapter 4.

Call to Action



Despite significant global efforts by numerous organizations to ensure SRHR, conservative perspectives continue to rise, undermining the autonomy and sexual reproductive rights of young individuals, particularly women, girls, and gender-diverse people. These perspectives often manifest as taboo subjects, religious doctrine, or political ideologies, advocating restrictive measures such as abstinence and chastity under the guise of SRH strategies to control certain demographics. Youth from minority groups, including LGBTQIA+, Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other communities, are frequently overlooked despite being the most vulnerable to SRH issues.

It is thus **imperative** to maintain a central focus on advocating for a **non-judgmental, intersectional and inclusive approach within digital SRH services**. These services should be accessible to all individuals, provided in a respectful and supportive manner, and aimed at empowerment. It is important to recognize that youth SRHR extends beyond contraceptive measures; it is a **fundamental element of youth well-being and autonomy, ensuring everyone can engage in positive and pleasurable sexual experiences**.

Centering Youth in Digital Health Interventions

To achieve the UN SDG Target 3.7, it is essential to focus on improving and scaling digital health interventions. Reports indicate that the rapid expansion of digital accessibility offers significant opportunities to disseminate reliable and non-judgmental

gmental SRH information online. However, to fully harness this potential, it is vital to **put youth, especially those from marginalized communities, at the center of these discussions.** This group, often the most affected, brings unique perspectives and experiences that can approach this serious issue innovatively. Involving youth from diverse backgrounds in all stages of intervention development—from needs assessment to content creation and implementation—is crucial for success.

Reaching the target population, especially at the outset, can be challenging. To improve participation and outreach, **organizations should implement measures that ensure accountability and transparency in all communications while protecting users' personal information and identities.** This approach has proven effective in encouraging participation and building trust with the audience. End users are invaluable in implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, providing crucial information, insights, and inspiration that might otherwise go unnoticed by the organizing team. **By centering the target population, your work in DHIs remains guided, relevant, and effective.**

Embracing Simplicity and Partnerships in DHIs

In addition to involving youth throughout the process, it is crucial to establish clear goals for the DHI right from the outset. These goals serve as the guiding principles for its development and form the basis for long-term scalability plans, providing a

robust foundation for the DHI's success. **Simplifying this process is key;** starting with straightforward yet impactful solutions often yields the most scalable and sustainable outcomes. It is beneficial to engage a variety of partners, **including the Fòs Feminista community,** to enrich your DHI journey with diverse perspectives and support. Building alliances with organizations already implementing similar DHIs fosters collaborative learning and partnerships, significantly broadening the reach and impact of these initiatives.

Navigating the Digital Landscape

Several DHIs with great potential fail to achieve long-term impact if not thoughtfully designed and implemented, resulting in significant losses for their communities. **Understanding the digital landscape in which a DHI operates is essential for effective planning and strategy development.** This includes assessing not only Internet access, but also preferred modalities for receiving information (such as Instagram, Facebook, and others), and the most engaging content formats for each target population. Moreover, organizations must stay updated on technological advancements and emerging sexual health challenges to ensure their interventions remain relevant and effective.

Leveraging Knowledge and Resources for Effective Implementation

Additionally, there is a wealth of online resources available to su-

pport organizations throughout their implementation journey, **particularly through the network of Fòs Feminista Alliance partners**. These partners, already experienced in deploying DHIs, offer valuable insights into effective strategies and potential pitfalls, which can significantly aid in navigating the initial challenges. By collaborating with these partners and sharing knowledge, organizations can harness collective wisdom to enhance the impact and sustainability of their DHIs. This collaborative approach not only fosters innovation but also ensures that DHIs are tailored to effectively meet the diverse needs of populations most in need of these SRH services.

Fostering Effective Digital Health Interventions for Youth SRHR Awareness

The recommendations outlined in this report are designed to create an enabling environment where early-stage DHIs can flourish across diverse settings. By integrating these recommendations, organizations can build robust, effective, and sustainable DHIs that play a pivotal role in enhancing youth awareness of SRHR. These DHIs are poised to empower young individuals with accurate and accessible information, fostering a deeper understanding of their own sexuality. Through targeted interventions, informed by the guidelines in this report, DHIs can make significant strides in promoting healthy behaviors and attitudes among youth, thereby contributing to broader public health goals and social well-being.

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Recommendations Report

Increasing and Strengthening the Availability of Digital Sexual and Reproductive Health Services with Youth-Friendly Approaches

