

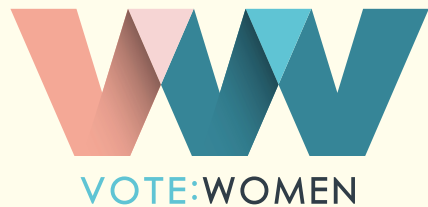
Co-creating a Digital Support Chatbot for Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence Survivors in Tanzania & Côte d'Ivoire





Colmena fund
for Women's Political Power

POLICY



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APU - African Parliamentary Union

CSO - Civil Society Organizations

FGD - Focus Group Discussion

GBV - Gender Based Violence

IU - Interparliamentary Union

TFGBV - Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence

UDHS - Uganda Demographic and Health Survey

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WHRDS - Women Human Rights Defenders

WIPs - Women in Politics

Glossary

Chatbot

An automated conversational tool powered by artificial intelligence that simulates human-like dialogue. In the context of this report, a WhatsApp-based chatbot was co-created to provide psychosocial support, information, and referral pathways to TFGBV survivors in Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire.

Disinformation

False or misleading information deliberately created and spread with the intent to deceive, manipulate, or cause harm. In the context of this report, disinformation is weaponized against Women in Politics and Women Human Rights Defenders to undermine their credibility, distort their public positions, and incite harassment.

Fact-Checking

The process of verifying the accuracy of information, particularly claims made in media or online content. In this report, fact-checking tools and strategies are discussed as a defense mechanism against gendered disinformation targeting WIPs and WHRDs.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Violence directed against an individual based on their gender, which disproportionately affects women and girls. GBV encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm and can occur in public, private, and digital spaces.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

Acts of gender-based violence enabled, amplified, or perpetuated through digital technologies. This includes online harassment, threats, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, surveillance, doxing, stalking, and the use of misinformation and disinformation to target and silence individuals based on their gender.

Misinformation

False or inaccurate information shared without necessarily harmful intent that is distinct from disinformation, which involves deliberate deception.

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Executive Summary

Women in politics (WIPs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire increasingly face technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), including online harassment, surveillance, image-based abuse, and gendered disinformation. False and manipulative narratives are commonly used to discredit women's leadership, incite harassment, and push them out of public and political spaces. These attacks have serious psychological and social consequences and often spill into offline life, undermining women's safety, participation, and well-being.

This project aimed at responding to a critical gap in current support mechanisms: the lack of survivor-centred, technology-enabled tools that provide immediate emotional and psychosocial support when digital harm occurs. Existing interventions largely focus on offline GBV or emphasize reporting and referrals, offering limited support for survivors dealing with the emotional impact of online abuse and gendered disinformation. As a result, many women are left without safe, private spaces to process harm, regain clarity, and decide if and how to seek further support.

Through participatory research a WhatsApp-based chatbot designed to provide supportive, humanized, and culturally responsive assistance to TFGBV survivors was co-created with WIPs and WHRDs. The chatbot's primary function is to offer emotional grounding, validation, and guided reflection, helping users navigate distress and make sense of disinformation-driven attacks. Information provision and referral pathways are secondary and survivor-led. The tool prioritizes anonymity, multilingual access, privacy safeguards, and a hybrid human-in-the-loop model for critical cases. By centering survivor agency and emotional safety, the chatbot complements existing support systems and strengthens responses to digitally mediated gendered harm. The implemented WhatsApp chatbot can be accessed [here](#).

Introduction and Background

The increasing integration of digital technologies into daily life has reshaped how individuals communicate, organize social relations, and participate in public discourse. According to the GSMA's State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023, smartphone ownership now exceeds half of the global population,¹ a trend that is associated with increased awareness, adoption, and more frequent and diverse use of mobile internet services.² At the same time, the same digital technologies have enabled new forms of harm and silencing, particularly for women whose visibility in digital spaces exposes them to targeted abuse, harassment, and manipulation.³ Digital environments, therefore, function as both sites of empowerment and arenas of heightened risk, especially for women engaged in public and political life.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) refers to acts of gendered harm enabled or amplified through digital technologies, including non-consensual sharing of intimate images, online threats and harassment, surveillance, doxing, and stalking.⁴ Evidence indicates that such harms experienced in digital spaces are closely linked to offline violence. Abuse frequently escalates across platforms and spills into physical contexts, reinforcing the online–offline continuum of violence in which digital attacks heighten risks to physical safety, psychological well-being, and social participation.⁵

TFGBV disproportionately affects women in politics (WIPs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs), particularly in African contexts characterised by shrinking civic spaces and rising political contestation. A joint report published by the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) and the African Parliamentary Union (APU) documented that women in public roles frequently face coordinated online attacks, threats, misinformation, and gendered disinformation, sexualized harassment.⁶ Despite the growing threat, such violence remains overlooked and under-scrutinised by policymakers, legislation, civil society, and citizens, with devastating results for those affected, as well as for society at large.⁷ Successive generations of women, girls, and vulnerable groups suffer new, brutal forms of violence, many of which go under the radar with little protection from the police or justice systems.⁸ Such violence has a chilling effect on women and girls' participation in civic and political spaces on and offline, undermining their safety, threatening progress towards gender equality and democratic participation.

1 GSMA, (2023), *State of Mobile Internet Connectivity Report, 2023*; <https://www.gsma.com/somic/>

2 *Ibid*

3 Brydolf-Horwitz, R. (2022). *Embodied and entangled: Slow violence and harm via digital technologies*. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 40(2), 391-408.

4 Rutgers International and the Generation G partnership, (2024), *Decoding Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Reality Check from Seven Countries*, Rutgers International, The Hague.

5 *Ibid*

6 Inter-Parliamentary Union and African Parliamentary Union, (2021) *Sexism, Harassment and Violence Against Women in Parliaments in Africa: Regional Study* (Geneva: IPU,).

7 Dunn, S. (2020), *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview*.

8 Rutgers International and the Generation G partnership, (2024), *Decoding Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Reality Check from Seven Countries*, Rutgers International, The Hague

The impact of online harassment on women in politics (WIPs) and WHRDs is profound and multifaceted. Existing evidence indicates that victims often experience a range of emotional and psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation and despair.⁹ The constant barrage of negative messages can lead to a loss of self-esteem, self-censorship online and withdrawal from public debates. Furthermore, the stigma associated with being harassed online can deter WIPs and WHRDs from seeking help or confiding in anyone. In addition to emotional distress, online harassment can have tangible consequences on these women's social life. Fear of escalation into offline harm, coupled with social stigma and victim-blaming, frequently discourages survivors from seeking support, intensifying psychological strain and limiting recovery.

Despite the growing prevalence of TFGBV, existing support systems remain poorly equipped to address the specific dynamics of digitally mediated harm.¹⁰ Many responses continue to prioritise offline forms of gender-based violence, emphasising reporting, legal remedies, or referrals, while offering limited psychosocial support for survivors experiencing online abuse and disinformation-driven attacks. This creates a temporal gap, as assistance is often unavailable at the moment harm occurs, and a psychological gap, as the emotional confusion and distress triggered by online attacks are insufficiently addressed. Survivors are often left without accessible, private, and survivor-centred, technology-enabled interventions that can operate within everyday digital environments while prioritising safety, agency, and psychosocial well-being. As such, it is imperative to recognize the seriousness of this issue and take proactive steps to support women in politics and WHRDS through both traditional and technological solutions.

The landscape of support systems for Women In Politics and Women Human Rights Defenders

Across many African contexts, support services for survivors of gender based violence including TFGBV remain fragmented, unevenly distributed, and limited in scope. Survivors often face significant barriers when attempting to report an incident of abuse or access assistance, as violence in most situations is considered a simple matter that survivors have to cope with on their own.¹¹ Traditional GBV response mechanisms such as medical care, psychosocial support, individual and group therapy sessions, legal aid, and police services are often unevenly distributed and concentrated in major urban areas. Rural regions frequently lack accessible services and awareness of the services that do exist.¹² Most of this support is primarily designated for offline GBV survivors therefore poorly aligned with the realities of TFGBV.

9 Koch, L., Russo Riva, M. P., & Steinert, J. I. (2025). *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Against Politically Active Women: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Political Consequences and Women's Coping Behaviors*. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 0(0).

10 Masunda, O & Manyeka, T. (2025). *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in The Workplace: Patterns and impact on women employed in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe*. *SALASIKA: Indonesian Journal of Gender, Women, Child, and Social Inclusion's Studies*. 8. 137-163. 10.36625/sj.v8i2.189.

11 UNFPA(2019), *Helping Survivors of gender based violence to heal and thrive*

12 SIDA (2024), *Preventing and responding to gender-based violence: technical note*

Survivors of TFGBV such as cyberbullying, image-based abuse and doxing, often encounter support services that lack clear guidance on documenting digital evidence, navigating platform reporting mechanisms, or addressing the psychological harm associated with sustained online attacks. This misalignment leaves many survivors without appropriate or timely assistance, particularly when abuse is ongoing, networked, and difficult to localise.

This gap is further exacerbated by the growing use of misinformation and disinformation as tools of gendered harm, particularly against WIPs and WHRDs.¹³ False narratives, manipulated content, and smear campaigns are frequently deployed online to undermine women's credibility, distort their public positions, and incite harassment or offline reprisals.¹⁴ Despite their severe psychological, reputational, and safety implications, such disinformation-driven attacks are rarely addressed within existing GBV support frameworks which tend to prioritise physical harm and legal redress over emotional recovery and reputational damage.

Organizations and networks mostly work on digital safety and security training with limited integration of other support services such as legal referral, hotlines, and psychosocial care¹⁵. In addition to limited support spaces for survivors of TFGBV, the survivors often find it difficult to get the courage to recount their GBV experience for fear of ostracization in the community and victim-blaming.¹⁶ Recent analyses note that online abuse is still largely “normalized,” with victims frequently blamed rather than supported.¹⁷ Analysis found that there's a shortage of comprehensive response mechanisms and support services like digital helplines, counselling, and legal aid for survivors of online harassment.¹⁸

This patchy landscape of limited, poorly coordinated, and often culturally misaligned support services constrains survivors' ability to access timely survivor-centred help. In the absence of low-threshold, confidential, and emotionally responsive entry points, many women are left to navigate TFGBV alone, increasing the risk of psychological, social harm, withdrawal from public life, and reduced participation in civic and political spaces. This often leaves them feeling isolated, retraumatized, and without viable options for safety or recovery.

Against this backdrop, Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire present illustrative cases of both emerging responses and persistent gaps in support for women in politics and women human rights defenders experiencing TFGBV. Examining these contexts highlights how national legal frameworks, civil society interventions, and sociocultural norms shape survivors' access to support, and highlights the need for context-sensitive, survivor-centred digital tools that complement existing mechanisms rather than replace them.

13 Bardall, G. (2022). *Nasty, fake and online: Distinguishing gendered disinformation and violence against women in politics*. In *Gender and security in digital space* (pp. 109-123). Routledge.

14 Tripathi, S. (2022). *Women and Online Harassment*. *Feminist Dissent*, (6), 133-158.

15 WCASI (2024), *Enhancing Digital Security and Resilience for Civil Society Organizations*

16 Souleymane Bayoulou (2024), *Barriers influencing the care of survivors of gender-based violence in the context of forced displacement in Kaya, Burkina Faso: a qualitative study*

17 Cipesa. (2025, December 3). *#BeSafeByDesign: a call to platforms to ensure women's online safety*. Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA). <https://cipesa.org/2025/12/besafebydesign-a-call-to-platforms-to-ensure-womens-online-safety/>

18 CIPESA (2025), *#Besafeby Design: A call to Platforms to ensure women's online Safety*

Tanzania

In Tanzania, women in politics and women human rights defenders continue to increasingly face technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Although a number of stakeholders have introduced interventions and support services for survivors of TFGBV, existing responses remain uneven in reach and are often limited in their ability to provide sustained, survivor-centred support at the moment harm occurs. Current interventions in Tanzania addressing TFGBV primarily include digital literacy training, establishing helplines, and mental health interventions. For example, LP Digital runs a TFGBV helpline and works with volunteer therapists to provide survivors with legal support, guidance, and mental health resources.¹⁹ The helpline enables partners with STOPNCII.org—an AI-powered tool to remove non-consensual intimate images—but its reach is limited to platforms willing to cooperate. Additionally, LP Digital works in collaboration with a pool of volunteer mental health professionals who provide psychosocial safety guidance and counselling to victims and survivors of online gender based violence but mental health therapy is still a bit of a new topic in Tanzania communities that is not clearly understood thus leading survivors to have to constantly recount their experiences which subsequently discourages them from seeking this intervention. This initiative offers immediate assistance to those facing harassment online and in public spaces, such as workplaces and has created a more supportive and proactive community, where everyone plays a role in reducing violence. There are other helplines that exist that offer support to TFGBV survivors, such as National Child Helpline, which responds to violence cases of women and children and is operated by C-Sema in collaboration with the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and is reachable by mobile networks in mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar.²⁰

Other existing interventions in Tanzania include basic digital literacy skills training for women and girls, tailor-made to fit their personal and professional needs, as well as equipping them with digital resilience tools and tactics to safeguard their existence and navigation online. However, other additional support interventions do not really focus on survivors directly but rather indirectly. For example, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO) has worked with other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Gender, Information, and Technology on an initiative to safeguard women and children from online and offline threats by developing a new pillar on TFGBV to add in the National Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children (2025-2029).²¹

Additionally, the legal framework in Tanzania is still evolving to keep pace with the rapid technological advancements. While there are some laws in place aimed at addressing TFGBV, they still require a more targeted approach.²² For instance, the 2015 Cybercrimes Act provides a legal basis for prosecuting various online offences, but its effectiveness has been questioned due to enforcement challenges and the evolving nature of cyber threats but also in rural areas where technological literacy is low.²³

19 Ndosi, C. (2023, July 27). *Online Gender-Based Violence in Tanzania: A Crisis in the making*. Medium. <https://carolndosi.medium.com/online-gender-based-violence-in-tanzania-a-crisis-in-the-making-d6a495c8527d>

20 UNFPA (2021), *Tanzanian helpline reaching thousands of at-risk women and girls every day*

21 UNESCO (2025), *UNESCO Strengthens Efforts to Tackle Gender-Based Violence in Media and Technology in Tanzania*

22 Byera, A. K. (2024). *Legal and practical challenges in preventing cyberbullying in Tanzania: Navigating Legislative gaps, Enforcement hurdles, and Social Realities*. *East African Journal of Law and Ethics*, 7(1), 111-122. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajle.7.1.2416>

23 Ibid

Côte d'Ivoire

In 2024, a cybercrime report from Côte d'Ivoire indicates that 12,100 cases were handled by the Plateforme de Lutte Contre la Cybercriminalité (PLCC), up from 8,132 in 2023.²⁴ The most frequently reported offences included atteinte à la dignité humaine (attacks on human dignity, similar to online incivility), which accounted for 2,822 cases, as well as online scams. Additionally, the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS 2011) revealed that 55 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years have experienced domestic violence.²⁵ Women leaders and human rights defenders are disproportionately targeted through coordinated online abuse designed to intimidate them out of public life. During elections, women in public roles report harassment, smear campaigns and doxxing – tactics meant to silence civic participation.²⁶

Support services for survivors of TFGBV do not differ a lot from those in Tanzania. For example, Internews in collaboration with local partners, built multi-layered support and response systems to address online hate speech and gendered online abuse. The systems included tracking online hate speech, media literacy, and a platform that was created for survivors and activists to share experiences and advice.²⁷ These interconnected mechanisms form a landscape that helps to amplify survivors' voices and improve collective response to online harassment. While the aforementioned support interventions are strong, they do not provide individualized survivor support which may hinder help seeking and effective recovery.

Overall, there are few interventions that specifically support survivors of technology-facilitated GBV. For example most of the helplines in the country operated by various stakeholders focus on GBV survivors not necessarily TFGBV. One example is the The NO MORE Global Directory a comprehensive international directory of domestic and sexual violence helplines, specialist support services, and resources for men, women, and those who identify as non-binary in almost every UN-recognized country and territory in the world. The site serves as a global hub of information and resources for victims and their loved ones and Ivory Coast is among the countries where it exists.²⁸

While these are promising interventions, they are mostly small-scale, untested and few of them aim to prevent technology-facilitated GBV.

24 ANSSI Côte d'Ivoire. (2025, Septembre 30). *Rapports d'activités - ANSSI Côte d'Ivoire*. ANSSI Côte D'Ivoire. <https://anssi.gouv.ci/rapports-dactivites/>

25 Wassimagnon, (2025), *Ivory Coast: Combating gender based violence , media equipped to better fight online gender based violence*

26 Sennen Houton & Lydia Zigom (2025), *Online abuse is real violence — and Africa's women and girls are paying the price*

27 Internews (2022), *In Côte D'Ivoire, We Raise the Red Card to Fight Online Hate Speech*

28 NOMORE: A directory of domestic and sexual violence helplines and services:<https://nomoredirectory.org/>

Why a Tech-based Survivor Support Intervention

In both Tanzania and Cote d'Ivoire, governments, NGOs, and women's rights groups are addressing TFGBV through awareness campaigns, digital literacy training, and online safety initiatives. Some organizations also provide counseling and legal support to survivors. However, accessible, survivor-centered services and safe spaces for open dialogue remain limited. Moreover, there are few dedicated survivor support services for survivors of TFGBV, most of the support interventions and strategies target survivors of offline GBV and therefore lack clear information on what constitutes TFGBV, how to document evidence, where to report, and what support services are available for them. A chatbot directly addresses this gap by offering immediate, private and consistent guidance at the moment harm occurs bridging the disconnect between public awareness efforts and individual survivor support.

TFGBV survivors face multiple barriers to seeking help including stigma, fear of retaliation, limited digital literacy, language barriers, distrust of authorities, and uneven access to specialised services, particularly outside urban centres. Many survivors are reluctant to approach police or formal institutions especially when abuse occurs online and is minimised or misunderstood. A chatbot provides a low threshold, non-judgemental and anonymous tool that survivors can access via whatsapp, a widely used platform, reducing fear and enabling survivors to seek help without exposing themselves to additional harm or disbelief.

Additionally, this chatbot is designed to respond in the main languages in the two countries—Swahili and French—to improve accessibility. It will be regularly updated by Pollicy to reflect other country-specific resources for TFGBV survivors including reporting mechanisms and referral pathways. This approach will ensure scalability and sustainability of the chatbot while complementing other existing support mechanisms. Moreover the chatbot offers survivors choice-based pathways that give survivors autonomy, dignity, and informed decision making on when, how and whether to escalate their case.

Beyond individual support this chatbot contributes to system-level improvements by identifying patterns of abuse without collecting personally identifiable data, informing advocacy and strengthening coordination among CSOs, feminists, digital rights actors, and government entities. Because TFGBV is underreported, this chatbot thus serves as a trusted first point of contact generating insights that can be used to inform policy and platform accountability while respecting data protection and ethical safeguards.

To address these challenges, this project co-created a digital support tool - a WhatsApp-based chatbot designed to provide timely, contextual and actionable support to women in politics and human rights defenders experiencing TFGBV in Tanzania and Cote d'Ivoire. The tool was developed using insights gathered from women directly affected by TFGBV through Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and individual Interviews to ensure contextual relevance, linguistic accessibility and alignment with existing support systems.

Methodology

This section explains the methodologies that guided the design process, which were threefold: examining and contextualizing the existing landscape of support systems available to survivors of TFGBV in Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire, designing a user-centred intervention that delivers real-time support, relevant information, and safe reporting pathways during or following incidents of TFGBV, and finally develop and empirically test this intervention to ensure its responsiveness to the sociocultural contexts, linguistic diversity, and lived realities of African women.

Data collection

A structured qualitative data collection process was conducted in two countries, Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) consisting of about 15 participants each comprising Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and Women in Politics (WIPs). A set of structured questions that focused on the research objectives were used to facilitate discussions with the participants. The questions focused on key aspects of existing support services in the two countries, co-creating the chatbot and what this resource would look like, the features, where it would be hosted, the languages it should include, and other components it would host which all helped map out and provide a clear understanding of the problem.

Interviews were conducted in person in Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and later analyzed to identify themes and patterns relevant to TFGBV digital support services.

Findings

The participatory research presented a complex digital and social situation where the success of the technology-based solution is largely a matter of the cultural context and the level of trust. The discussions asserted that the application of technology for tackling TFGBV needs to involve a solution that deals with the stigmas, the geopolitical realities, and the special psychological needs of the African women. The findings are divided into the two main areas: Mental Health (particularly OGBV) and Fact-Checking to demonstrate both cross-cultural commonalities and distinctive regional insights.

Existing support interventions for TFGBV survivors

Participants emphasized that mental health support for TFGBV survivors is not merely about clinical access but about overcoming societal barriers that equate distress with weakness or supernatural causes. In Tanzania, the significant lack of understanding regarding mental health as a clinical issue was noted. Distress is often attributed to external factors such as bad luck, lack of financial opportunity, or superstitious beliefs like witchcraft rather than psychological conditions. Consequently, survivors of TFGBV struggle to open up due to societal pressure to remain strong and the belief that these issues are faith-related. Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire, a strong stigma exists associating mental health with “madness” or severe physical disease, meaning the profession is not widely understood or valued by older generations. Women often prefer seeking help from religious leaders or community heads rather than clinical professionals, whom they may not trust to understand the violence they experience.

False information is weaponized against WIPs to question their legitimacy, often alleging they attained positions through illicit means or are culturally unfit for leadership, a narrative that frequently forces them to withdraw from public spaces to avoid harassment. While disinformation often originates on smaller networks before migrating to viral platforms like Instagram and TikTok in East Africa, the landscape in Côte d'Ivoire is heavily influenced by election cycles and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) from external actors. Participants in both regions noted that limited opportunities for professional fact-checking exacerbate these challenges, as many organizations rely on volunteers and lack state funding.

In response, stakeholders employ various verification strategies, utilising global resources like Google Fact Check Tools and Africa Check alongside regional initiatives like Dubawa, which specializes in audio verification for local languages. Despite these efforts, experts emphasise that currently, the most immediate defence involves cultivating a “critical mind” to manually detect anomalies in AI-generated content, such as lip-sync errors or robotic audio cadences. All these challenges illuminate the need for a specialised system designed specifically for women leaders that integrates fact-checking capabilities with mental health support, offering a targeted technological solution to mitigate the multifaceted impacts of gendered disinformation.

Co-creation Process: Developing the Chatbot with participants

Participants articulated the need for a digital support system that extends beyond standard automated responses. They emphasised that the chatbot developed by Pollicy from the co-creation process should not be limited to pre-programmed replies, but should meaningfully respond to the lived realities of women in politics and women human rights defenders. The design of the chatbot therefore incorporated the critical considerations identified by participants from the two countries ensuring that the bot reflected their priorities, risks and support needs rather than offering generic or purely automated interactions.

The Need for “Humanization”: It was agreed by all participants that the chatbot should not be a mechanical voice but rather a person in the background that shows understanding through words, thus acting as a friend to support the user instead of a service provider treating the case. The bot should be talking in a **“story-mode”** manner, like **“How was your day?”** instead of conducting the ordinary Q&A to create the necessary intimacy for the user to open up about the trauma.

Anonymity: Participants identified anonymity as a critical requirement. They explained that anonymous interaction would enable users to speak openly about sensitive issues including suicidal thoughts without fear of judgement, a level of disclosure that is often more difficult in face-to-face engagements.

Platform Preferences: WhatsApp ranked the highest among the preferred platforms, with its usage reported by participants to be very extensive among women users. However, there was a very strong preference for text communication rather than calls for the very first contact, which would be done in order to secure the privacy and comfort of the users.

Chatbot Development and Its System Features

Based on the aggregated findings and the aforementioned considerations from participants, the technical requirements for the chatbot were refined to address the specific intersections of safety, culture, and technology. The chatbot that was developed has the following features:

Privacy Protocols: To address the **“Burn After Reading”** requirement, the system architecture explores features for time-bound access, where the application or chat history can expire or auto-delete after a set period to ensure domestic safety.

Hybrid “Human-in-the-Loop” Model: Users expressed a **“paradoxical”** desire to know they are talking to a bot (for lack of judgment) but simultaneously want to believe there is a human **“backend”** capable of intervening if things get critical. The chatbot therefore detects **“red flag”** keywords (e.g., “kill myself”) and seamlessly transitions the user to a human specialist.

Multilingual and Dialect Support: Given the limitations of AI in local dialects, the chatbot has been trained to support local languages (Swahili, French, and local variations) to be accessible and credible.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that technology-facilitated gender-based violence constitutes a significant and escalating threat to women in politics and women human rights defenders in Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire, operating across an online–offline continuum that amplifies psychological, social, and political harm. While digital technologies have expanded opportunities for participation and visibility, they have simultaneously enabled new forms of gendered violence, including harassment, surveillance, image-based abuse, and the strategic use of misinformation and disinformation to delegitimize women's leadership and silence civic engagement. Existing support systems across both contexts remain fragmented, unevenly distributed, and largely oriented toward offline forms of violence, leaving TFGBV survivors with limited, inaccessible, or culturally misaligned avenues for support.

The results demonstrate that help-seeking barriers are not only infrastructural, but are deeply embedded in sociocultural norms, mental health stigma, distrust of formal institutions, and the normalization of online abuse, which are exacerbated by the weaponization of misinformation and organized digital attacks, especially at politically charged times, to which existing GBV frameworks are ill-equipped to respond, leading survivors to feel isolated, retraumatized, and limited in their participation in public life with broader implications for democratic inclusion and gender equality.

By adopting a participatory, co-creation approach, this survivor-centred, WhatsApp-based chatbot addresses critical gaps in the current support ecosystem. This intervention offers an accessible, anonymous, and culturally responsive entry point for survivors, integrating psychosocial support, contextual guidance, fact-checking resources, and referral pathways within a single digital interface. Importantly, the emphasis on humanized interaction, multilingual access, privacy safeguards, and a hybrid human-in-the-loop model reflects survivors' lived realities and trust requirements, enhancing the likelihood of meaningful engagement.

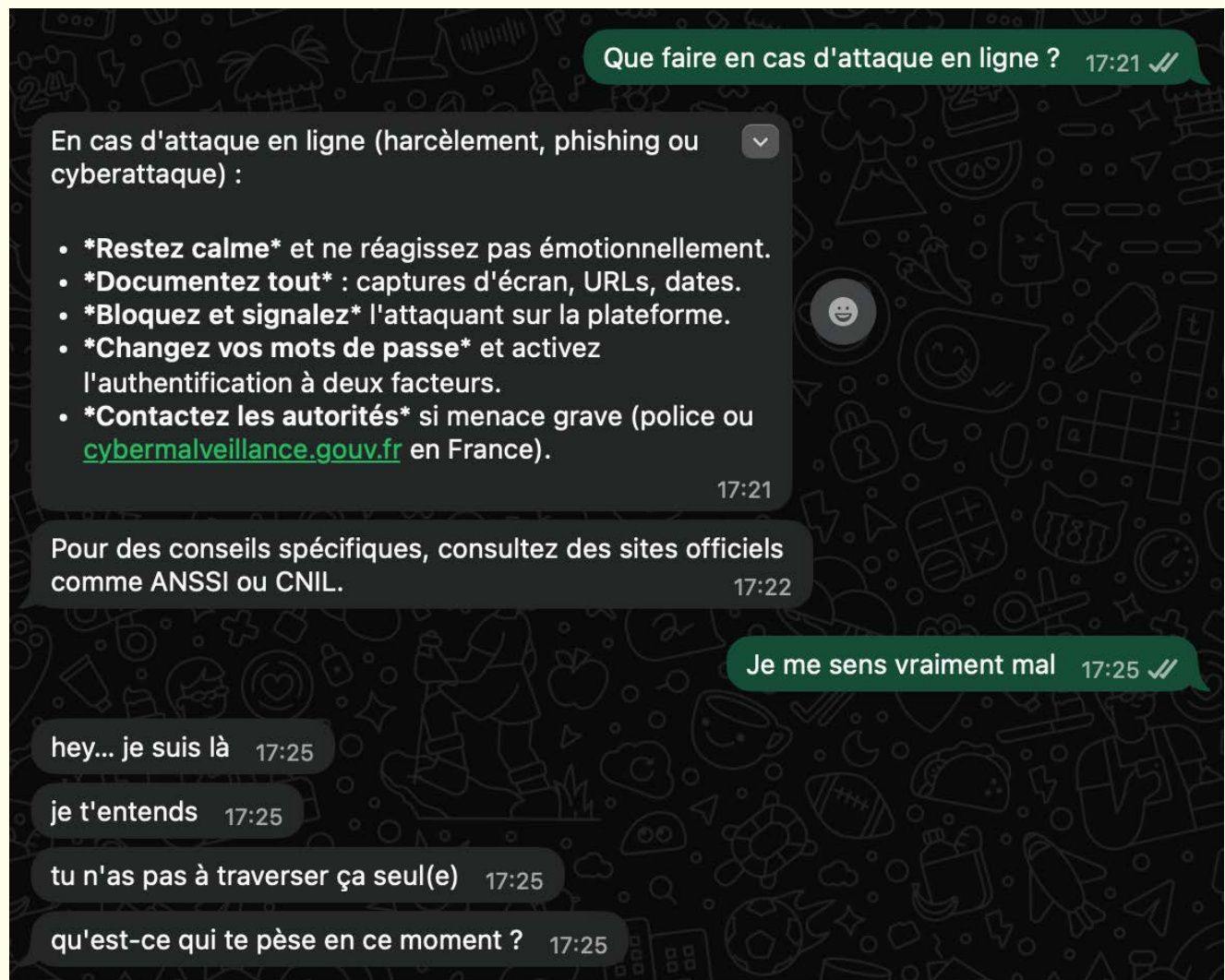
Beyond individual support, the chatbot represents a scalable mechanism for generating ethically collected, non-identifiable insights into patterns of TFGBV, contributing to improved coordination among civil society actors, evidence-based advocacy, and policy development. While technological interventions alone cannot dismantle the structural drivers of gendered violence, this study illustrates how carefully designed digital tools can complement existing services, strengthen survivor agency, and mitigate harm within constrained civic environments. Ultimately, addressing TFGBV requires integrated, context-sensitive responses that recognize the inseparability of online and offline violence and place survivors' dignity, safety, and autonomy at the centre of both technological and institutional solutions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: French Interactions with the chatbot



Appendix B:



Did Tanzanian president win by 98% ?

14:20 ✓✓

Yes. 14:20

Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan was declared the winner with nearly 98% of the vote.

14:21

Multiple independent reports confirm this official result from the October 29, 2025 election.

14:21



Tanzanian President Hassan declared win...

Election triggered days o...

↪ aljazeera.com

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14:21

L'élection en Côte d'Ivoire a-t-elle été truquée ?

14:23 ✓✓

There is no verified information available to confirm this.

14:24

The provided evidence discusses past concerns, disinformation, and fake news around Côte d'Ivoire's 2025 election, but does not confirm that the election itself was rigged.

14:24

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14:24

