



# A SAFE, SISTER SPACE

An evaluation of the Safe Sisters digital safety training program for women, and case studies from alumni

Research by Neema Iyer



25  
X25

The background is a complex, multi-layered composition of geometric shapes and colors. It features a grid of squares in shades of blue, green, and purple. Overlaid on this are various patterns: a grid of small circles in purple and pink, a grid of larger squares in teal and blue, and a grid of even larger squares in orange and yellow. The colors transition from cool blues and greens on the left to warmer oranges and yellows on the right. The overall effect is a vibrant, digital, and abstract aesthetic.

**x 25**  
**25**

# 25X25 SERIES

Internews is an international non-profit that supports independent media in 100 countries — from radio stations in refugee camps, to hyper-local news outlets, to filmmakers and technologists. We train journalists and digital rights activists, tackle disinformation, and offers business expertise to help media outlets thrive financially. For nearly 40 years, we have helped partners reach millions of people with trustworthy information that saves lives, improves livelihoods, and holds institutions accountable.

We commissioned this research as part of the 25 x 25 initiative, the organization's strategic commitment to increase robust evaluation of our work by delivering 25 research studies by 2025.

We have made this commitment because we want to know which of our approaches are most effective in order to bring them to scale, to strengthen our understanding of the impact for communities when their information environments improve over time, to make our contribution to the global evidence base and to hold ourselves accountable to the people we serve.

We will do this work alongside external research partners who share our vision to realize the potential of a digitally connected world: a world in which evidence-based information advances human progress, enables broad opportunity and accountability, and fuels vibrant civic debate. We know we will only achieve this through a deep understanding of the contexts we work in and a constant drive to learn and improve.

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Illustrations by Pollicy

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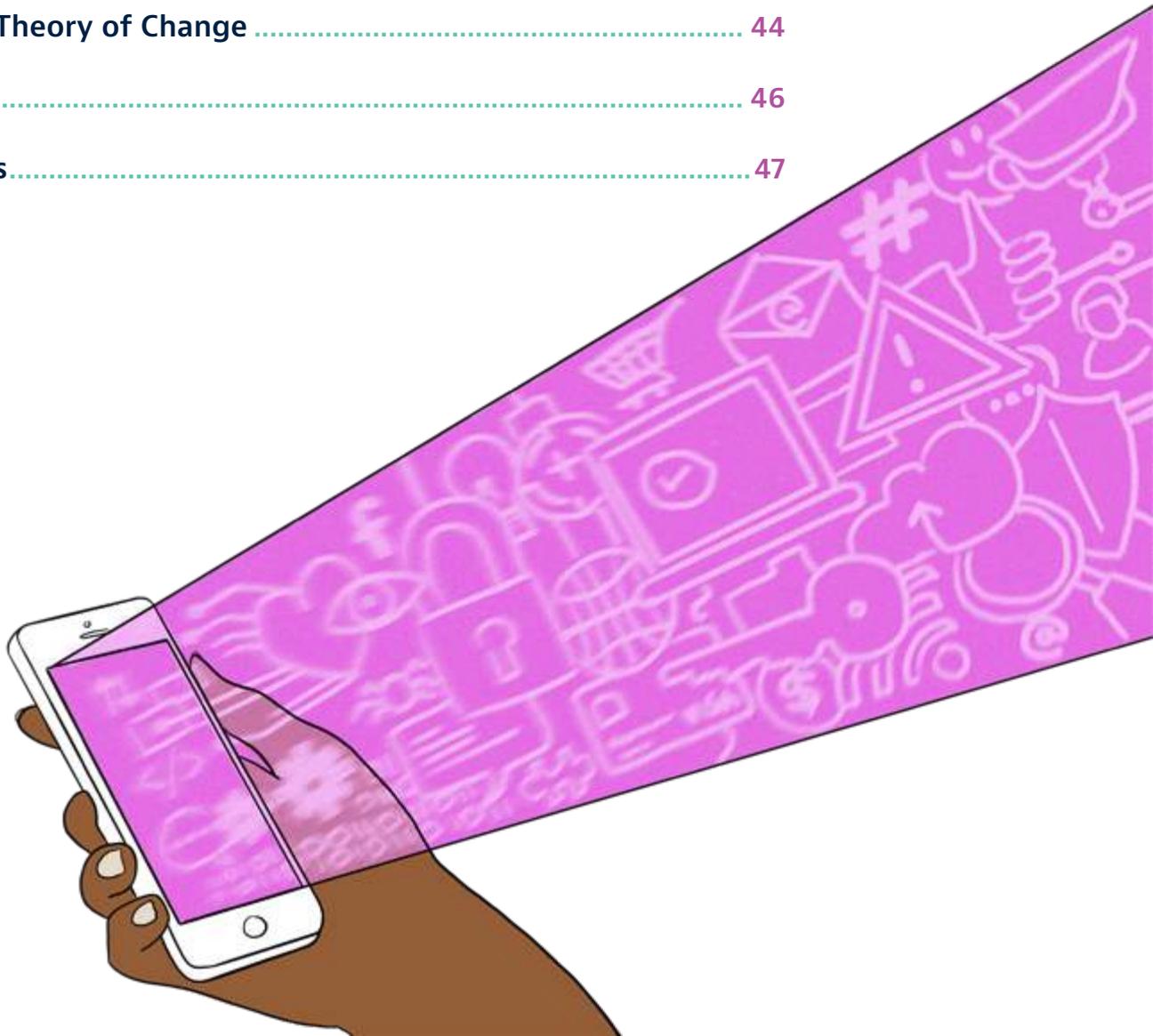
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The purpose of this ex-post evaluation is for Internews to understand the impact that Safe Sisters has had on women in East Africa by documenting and publicly sharing their stories and evaluating the training approach itself. As women and girls come online for the first time, they disproportionately face violence, which creates risks to their physical safety and stifles their ability to capture the Internet's transformative economic and social potential.

Internews, together with partner DefendDefenders — a Uganda-based non-governmental organization (NGO) — developed the Safe Sisters program, a year-long fellowship that provides women human rights defenders and journalists with the techniques and tools they need to navigate online spaces safely, assume informed risks, and take control of their lives in an increasingly digital world.

**The Safe Sisters program provides women human rights defenders and journalists with the techniques and tools they need to navigate online spaces safely, assume informed risks, and take control of their lives in an increasingly digital world.**

## METHODS

This evaluation used a qualitative research approach, grounded in storytelling. This included the engagement of Uganda-based researchers to carry out interviews with Safe Sisters alumni. Five (5) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and two (2) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted using questionnaire survey tools that were developed together with Internews.



## KEY FINDINGS

- Safe Sisters alumni found the program to be a unique and participatory experience; it provided a safe and open learning experience and increased their knowledge about digital safety for women.
- Safe Sisters alumni have been able to increase their income with the skills and credentials obtained during the Safe Sisters training program, including the establishment of businesses and civil society organizations that focus on the advancement of the digital rights of women.
- Safe Sisters alumni do not wish to include men in the programming and appreciate the safe space created with women-only participants.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide ongoing mentorship and financial support through grants to the Safe Sisters alumni.
- Revise the curriculum to keep up with a rapidly changing digital landscape (e.g., Zoombombing, NCII, child safety, etc.)
- Consider ongoing monitoring and evaluation of both Safe Sisters participants and the participants in their grant-funded programs (e.g., pre-post data on changes to knowledge, attitudes, and practices on digital safety).

# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE

Internews envisions a digitally connected world in which evidence-based information advances human progress, enables broad opportunity and accountability, and fuels vibrant civic debate. This vision hinges on the ability of independent media, civil society, human rights defenders, policy-makers, and the wider public to create and maintain **healthy information environments** that enable everyone to make better-informed decisions, bridge divides, participate more fully in their communities, and hold power to account. We approach our work through a human-centered design lens and an understanding that the healthy information environments we aim to support are built around multi-faceted, constantly changing **information ecosystems**. As the next 3 billion people come online by 2025, the interconnectedness and complexity of information ecosystems only expands; and as the ability to exchange information and build community becomes less rooted in physical places, the ability for everyone to safely engage in online spaces is a vital component of achieving healthier information environments.

Internews envisions a digitally connected world in which evidence-based information advances human progress, enables broad opportunity and accountability, and fuels vibrant civic debate.

# INFORMATION ECOSYSTEMS

**Information Ecosystems** are more than a network of news, media, and information channels; they include informal, personal, civic, community, and trust-based information flows that may or may not be influenced by news or media. Most importantly, Information Ecosystems are uniquely defined by the "information behavior" of the human beings who live in them. In the constant quest of human beings to connect with information, the ways in which they consume, produce, contribute to, interact with, and behave around their information supply are what make Information Ecosystems dynamic, diverse, and sometimes quirky and unpredictable.

# INFORMATION ECOSYSTEMS

Women and girls coming online for the first time disproportionately face violence, which creates risks to their physical safety and stifles their ability to capture the Internet's transformative economic and social potential. A growing body of research identifies online violence against women as a pervasive threat to those who use the internet and mobile phones. According to the United Nations Broadband Commission, "almost three quarters of women online have been exposed to some form of cyber violence," and 1 in 5 women live in a country where online abuse is unlikely to be punished. In a statement, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights warned, "if trends continue, instead of empowering women, online spaces may actually widen sex and gender-based discrimination and violence."

Online violence against women is especially dangerous not only because of the brutal and damaging harassment they face, but also because it most often serves to discredit, shame, or defame the victim offline. Women human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and leaders face particular risk. According to a recent study by the International Women's Media Foundation, 2 out of 3 female journalists surveyed said they had been threatened or harassed online at least once, and roughly 40% of those said that they censored themselves on certain topics due to online harassment. In many cases, women are forced to go offline, and a few even leave the field entirely (Ferrier, 2018).

**2 out of 3 female journalists surveyed said they had been threatened or harassed online at least once,**

While Internews had been offering free digital security trainings worldwide for many years, we started to notice a pattern: women were not applying to these entry-level trainings as often as men did, and thus there were fewer women digital safety trainers that could help train other women. Looking deeper at this issue and talking to women who were eligible for these trainings but were not applying to them, Internews saw that many women would not engage on "digital security" as a topic because they were discouraged by the perception that the issues are extremely technical or require a background in computer science or IT, even though the majority of the concepts do not require any technical expertise. Many of the women who tried to find more information on these topics reported that there were no resources that provided contextualized guidance around the unique threats that they, as women, face, or *usable* solutions for the problems they need to solve. Ultimately, Internews realized that the barriers women faced when they wanted to learn how to protect themselves online were too high, and the approaches that did exist were written mainly by men and did not take their unique threats and needs into account

**The barriers women faced when they wanted to learn how to protect themselves online were too high, and the approaches that did exist were written mainly by men and did not take their unique threats and needs into account**

needs into account. Women needed better, more targeted digital security information and training, as such knowledge is critical to their ability to survive — and thrive — in an increasingly digital world.

In response to these needs, Internews developed the Safe Sisters program in 2017, with partner DefendDefenders, a Uganda-based NGO that supports human rights defenders (HRDs) in East Africa and the Horn of Africa. The Safe Sisters program is a year-long fellowship that provides women HRDs and journalists with the techniques and tools they need to navigate online spaces safely, assume informed risks, and take control of their lives in an increasingly digital world. Safe Sisters builds and empowers networks of women by providing them with digital security education and tools that are relevant to them and supports them to transfer that knowledge back to their own communities. The fellowship was deliberately designed for the participants to spend a lot of time learning and training together, so that when the program is over, Safe Sisters alumni will have started their own regional networks of trusted female digital security trainers, where they can ask questions, share knowledge, and collaborate.

Internews ran the pilot Safe Sisters fellowship program with DefendDefenders in East Africa in 2017-18, which introduced digital safety to 13 women journalists, HRDs, and activists from eight countries in East Africa through a combination of in-person trainings, online self-study, and small grants to conduct digital safety awareness raising trainings within their communities. Through the small grants alone, the pilot cohort of Safe Sisters fellows trained 255 women and 22 men on digital safety. In 2018-2019,

Figure 1.  
Safe Sisters Fellowship  
Overview.



Internews and DefendDefenders ran a second round of the Safe Sisters fellowship for nine women from East and the Horn of Africa. In 2019-2020, DefendDefenders ran the third round for 11 women. As of 2020, 33 women from East and the Horn of Africa have been trained through Safe Sisters, and Internews has several future trainings planned in West Africa, Southern Africa, South Asia, and MENA.

Through this ex-post evaluation, Internews aims to gain a deeper understanding about what is required to create innovative and sustainable training programs that help women participate more fully in their communities, as well as identify and mitigate physical and digital security risks. The evaluation examines whether the targeted population of Safe Sisters participants continues to exhibit changes in their knowledge, skills, and behavior around digital safety and security that have been anecdotally observed since the program started.

To begin the evaluation, the Safe Sisters team at Internews used the organization's overarching theory of change to reconstruct the program's intended causal pathways to assess in a step-by-step approach how the program contributed to the outcomes observed among program participants. Please refer to [page 43](#) of this report to view Internews' theory of change.

The reconstructed and adapted theory of change is outlined in the figure below and was used in this ex-post evaluation to document the causal pathways for the Safe Sisters program. By clearly outlining and mapping out how change happens as a result of the Safe Sisters program, the team was able to reflect on the impact of the program on participants and consider what is required to produce a replicable model that can be used to guide quality implementation in varying contexts.

**Figure 2.** Safe Sisters training session on how to use data to advocate for women's rights online.



## SITUATING THE SAFE SISTERS FELLOWSHIP IN INTERNEWS' THEORY OF CHANGE



### Safe, Inclusive Access

### Safe, Inclusive Access in the Safe Sisters Fellowship

<p><b>Challenges</b></p>	<p>In an unhealthy information environment, the information necessary to make informed decisions and fully participate in civic life — if it exists in the first place — is not readily available to everyone. People, especially marginalized groups, must risk their reputation, psycho-social, or even physical safety to obtain the information they need in their daily lives and make their voices heard.</p>	<p>Despite the rise of online harassment and violence against women, women lack contextually relevant, accessible resources, and other support to learn how to protect themselves and their peers online.</p>
<p><b>Activities</b></p>	<p>Activities that expand safe, inclusive access provide practical strategies for circumventing barriers to accessing information and work with communities to adapt those strategies to meet their needs. This often includes training programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Training</li> <li>■ Mentoring</li> <li>■ Community-building (within the cohorts)</li> <li>■ Community awareness raising (by the Safe Sisters)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outputs</b></p>	<p>Strategies for overcoming barriers to access are introduced and localized, often through community champions (individuals or CSOs).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Targeted women are trained in digital security best practices over two, five-day sessions</li> <li>■ Safe Sisters support network formed</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p>	<p>Improved ability of info consumers to use devices and platforms safely. Improved ability of information consumers to develop and apply strategies to assess and mitigate risks in digital spaces. Marginalized groups are empowered to participate safely in virtual spaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Trained women will practice/adopt safe online behaviors and will be better equipped/empowered to address online harassment.</li> <li>■ Trained women will be empowered to raise awareness of digital security best practices among their own targeted communities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact</b></p>	<p>Expanding safe, inclusive access, in conjunction with the expansion of good information, strong business models, critical assessment, and accountable institutions, fosters a healthy information environment that enables everyone to make better-informed decisions, bridge divides, participate more fully in their communities, and hold power to account.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Women can safely access quality information online that meets their needs on the platform of their choice.</li> <li>■ Trained women are equipped with skills, experience, and networks that enable them to engage with and enrich the wider digital security practitioner community.</li> </ul>

The evaluation team also developed and piloted a digital security situational analysis tool with women in Cameroon that identified the digital safety needs/threats faced by women in target communities.

The Safe Sisters team at Internews will incorporate the advice and recommendations from this report into the next iterations of the Safe Sisters program and include the needs assessment as the first step for rolling the program out in a few countries or with a new community. With the global pandemic taking its toll, individuals and organizations are forced to move much of their work to online spaces, which exposes them to new digital threats. Considering online education, there is a greater need to focus digital hygiene awareness on younger populations than previously. This is a critical time to consider expanding the reach of the Safe Sisters programs, both within East Africa and globally.

## LEARNING METHODOLOGIES USED IN THE SAFE SISTERS PROGRAM

Foundational digital safety curricula developed by Internews advises digital security/safety trainers to structure modules using the Activity-Discussion-Input-Deepening-Synthesis or ADIDS framework which the authors found effective for engaging adult training participants learning what can be a technical and complex topic (Aryal and Jones, 2014; Jones and Aryal, 2016). The ADIDS framework — which is used in the Safe Sisters training curriculum — is grounded in the work of American educator Malcolm Knowles who distilled extant thought on adult learning — or *andragogy* — into actionable principles for instructors. In contrast to earlier work theorizing andragogy as a mechanism for social change, Knowles focused more on the needs of adult learners as individuals and how to meet them rather than any potential for collective advancement (Loeng, 2018).

Although Knowles' interpretation dominated for several decades, it has been criticized for lacking nuance in several areas. Critiques of Knowles and departures from his approach offer more expansive ways of learning and knowing that centers learners over instructors (heutagogy), the lived experience and personal evolution of adult learners (transformative learning), and situatedness (critical theory, international education literature, and Bangura's ubuntu-gogy) (Bangura, 2005; Merriam and Bierema, 2013; Tran and Wall, 2019). Although Knowles' andragogy is not a panacea, this "art and science of helping adults learn" (Merriam and Bierema, 2013) has enduring value in the field of adult education and enduring relevance in the digital safety trainer community. Although Safe Sisters both uses the ADIDS training approach and teaches

participants to use it, the fellowship in its entirety also adds elements of praxis and collectivism present in the broader literature on adult learning. The fellowship's emphasis on working with HRDs, facilitated independent learning through a small grants program, and fostering community, set it apart from more traditional digital security training programs.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

While Internews and DefendDefenders received a lot of positive feedback from Safe Sisters alumni over the years about how the program impacted them and how they were using what they learned to make themselves and their communities safer, most of this data was not adequately captured in the small-scale evaluations that were conducted immediately after the fellowships ended. Since Internews is working to grow Safe Sisters further, the program's co-founder and programmatic lead, Haley Slafer, wanted to better understand: a) what impact it has had on the participants years after they attended the trainings, b) what made it so different from other digital security training initiatives, c) if/how men should be included in the program, and d) how she could understand the needs of women HRDs and journalists in new countries in order to scale the Safe Sisters approach.

Internews hired Pollicy ("the evaluation team"), a women-run feminist research organization based in Uganda, to conduct the research, which was split into two main pieces: 1) conduct an ex-post evaluation of the Safe Sisters program to understand the impact the project had on the alumni and why it was so effective, and 2) develop and pilot a digital security situational analysis tool so Internews can understand the digital threats women in a new country face and localize the Safe Sisters approach accordingly. Thus, the objectives of the 25x25 evaluation project for Safe Sisters were:

- Review the curricula of Safe Sisters and digital security training,
- Document the impact of Safe Sisters on previous participants through the participant stories,
- Understand the value of Safe Sisters compared to other digital security training programs,

- Look at how men should/can be included in future Safe Sisters programming,
- Develop a digital security situational analysis tool that can be used across all future Safe Sisters programs, and
- Pilot the digital security situational analysis tool with feminist activists and journalists from the Anglophone Cameroon area, and write up the results in a brief report.

## THE EVALUATION TEAM AND SITUATEDNESS

Pollicy's evaluation team consisted of Neema Iyer (Executive Director of Pollicy), with support from Bonnita Nyamwire (Research Manager at Pollicy) and Sandra Nabulega (Junior Researcher).

Neema Iyer is the founder and Executive Director of Pollicy, a civic technology organization based in Kampala, Uganda. She has extensive experience working with the Safe Sisters program, through interactions with Internews, DefendDefenders, and the participants, within the Safe Sisters training context and externally as well. She has held and coordinated several similar trainings such as the Cyberwomen Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, in June 2018, where previous Safe Sisters stepped in as trainers. Neema also works closely with several Safe Sisters through other engagements such as the #DigiSecDialogues, through the Digital Human Rights Lab, and through collaborations on research projects and conference presentations.

As the primary investigator of this ex-post evaluation, Neema brings in deep knowledge through prior engagement with the Safe Sisters training program and is familiar with some of the achievements of the participants over the past 2-3 years. Some insights listed within the body of the evaluation may be subjective in nature, based on interactions with participants and on knowledge of the digital safety ecosystem in the Horn and East Africa.

# METHODOLOGY

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Internews developed key questions to guide the evaluation. The questions are as follows:

**1**

What made the Safe Sisters approach successful? Why?

**4**

How have some participants used what they learned in Safe Sisters in their lives?

**2**

What changes did Safe Sisters have on participants' lives?

**5**

How can/should men be included in the future?

**3**

How does Safe Sisters' experiences/trainings compare to other traditional digital security trainings?

**6**

What do we need to know about threats/needs of women before starting Safe Sisters in new communities?

## EVALUATION DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

Pollicy used a qualitative approach grounded in storytelling for this evaluation of the Safe Sisters program. Achievements of the Safe Sisters program were observed by documenting the perceived and self-reported life changes participants experienced as well as asking participants for contextual data on income and employment history. Uganda-based researchers carried out interviews in line with social distancing protocols. The evaluation team used a Do No Harm approach, focusing on people-centered language and prioritizing accessibility for respondents.

Five (5) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and two (2) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted using questionnaire survey tools that were developed together with Internews. Three out of the five qualitative interviews and the focus group discussions were conducted virtually over Zoom. Two interviews were conducted in-person, adhering to the COVID-19 standard operating procedures of Uganda.

Focus group discussions were selected as a primary method to allow participants to relate, share stories, and openly discuss issues and experiences from participating in the Safe Sisters program. The first FGD was conducted with Safe Sisters alumni from different cohorts and had four participants (one from cohort 1, one from cohort 2, and two from cohort 3). The second FGD had three participants from trainings organized by DefendDefenders and Encrypt Uganda, who had not participated in any previous Safe Sisters training. Participants were asked to describe their perceptions of the Safe Sisters program as it compares with other digital security focused training programs. The women from the two FGDs were between the ages of 25-40, had earned at least a Bachelor's degree, and worked for civil society or media organizations.

For the digital security situational analysis tool, the evaluation team developed a basic landscape assessment survey tool and had Safe Sisters trainers and digital safety experts review it. In order to pilot it, the evaluation team worked with Internews' partner, Women For a Change Cameroon (WFAC), who distributed the survey to their network of feminist activists in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, and got 30 responses, including 26 women. The evaluation team also did desk research to understand the political and legal situation for women's rights online in Cameroon to provide necessary context to the digital security situational analysis report for Anglophone Cameroon.

**Figure 3.**  
Safe Sisters practice  
threat modeling in a  
training session.



## DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation team developed two qualitative data collection tools that included a consent form for use in the KIIs and FGDs. The KII questionnaire covered thematic questions on course content, income generation, education opportunities, and life skills and program impact. Each question was accompanied by potential probing questions to investigate further into specific topics as they arose, giving weight to the respondents' thoughts and direction of their answers. Questions enabled the evaluators to understand personal hurdles and successes associated with the program, as well as tracing income generation and employment outcomes in the months and years after participation in the training program. The FGD questions covered similar content as the KII questionnaire, yet the format of the FGDs enabled collaborative answers with more opportunities for probing by both the evaluator and the participants' peers. All interviews were conducted in English. The FGD questionnaire can be found in section 8.1, and the KII questionnaire can be found in section 8.2.

Transcribed interviews and audio files were kept in a secure digital location and cleaned after transcription and uploading. Note: The quotes that are included in this report are from participants from the Safe Sisters ex-post evaluation KIIs or FGDs.

In addition to the KIIs and FGDs, a digital security situational analysis tool was developed in order to learn the needs, threats, and key information, including local laws and customs, that Internews needs to know in advance of organizing a Safe Sisters training program for any particular community. Feedback from several global field experts were incorporated into the tool in the final iteration. The evaluation team piloted the situational analysis with a community of activists in the Anglophone region of Cameroon, in order to test the efficacy of the tool in providing a rapid snapshot for the deployment of Safe Sisters across different geographical regions.

## SAMPLE

Participants for the Safe Sisters evaluation were recruited using two main channels: 1) purposive sampling, in which direct emails were sent to at least one participant from each cohort who had made significant strides publicly in the advancement of digital safety for women in their communities. This could take the form of registering a civil society organization with a digital rights focused mission, becoming a digital safety trainer, or becoming a vocal proponent for digital rights and safety for women; and 2) referrals through partner organizations DefendDefenders and Encrypt Uganda. All

focus group participants were offered a stipend equivalent to \$15 USD for mobile data via mobile money platforms.

## LIMITATIONS

Rapid evaluations often do not fully encapsulate the complete photo. Being largely a qualitative analysis, this ex-post evaluation represents the narrative of the Safe Sisters program, rather than a statistically robust picture. This research utilizes a story-telling approach to document program success.

Additionally, the time frame for interviews was short. Gathering data for the sample size in a short period of time may not capture all alumni of the program.

**Figure 4.** Participant places sticky note during threat modeling exercise.



# RESULTS

## SAFE SISTERS IN COMPARISON TO OTHER DIGITAL SECURITY TRAINING PROGRAMS

To understand differences in perceptions between alumni of the Safe Sisters program and that of other training programs, two FGDs were conducted: one with only Safe Sisters alumni and one with women from training programs unaffiliated with Safe Sisters training and conducted by partner organizations, such as DefendDefenders or Encrypt Uganda.

While it is difficult to ascertain differences in skills learned over the course of the program due to the lack of pre- and post-data on digital safety knowledge, some key differences were identified between the two groups.

**Camaraderie:** Women who had not participated in a Safe Sisters training appeared to have weaker bonds with fellow participants. These participants were more likely to turn to the trainers for support or resources, rather than fellow participants.

**Figure 5.** Safe Sisters session on understanding the forms of online violence against women.



**Post-training collaborations:** Women who had not participated in a Safe Sisters training appeared to have engaged in fewer collaborative opportunities with their peers. They were also less likely to lead on their own initiative.

**Understanding online gender-based violence:** Women who had not participated in a Safe Sisters training (and who were not involved in women-rights or feminist organizations) were less likely to focus their work on problem-solving or building awareness around online gender-based violence.

**Participant Selection:** Women who had not participated in a Safe Sisters training were more likely to be handpicked for their training, rather than apply for open spots. The following quote from the focus group shed light on the selection process for other women-focused digital safety training programs in the region:

*“With the [non-Safe Sisters digital security training] we were just identified as organizations working directly with women and in this case, our organization was identified and selected as a participant for that training.”*

—Participant of a non-Safe Sisters Digital Security Training in Uganda

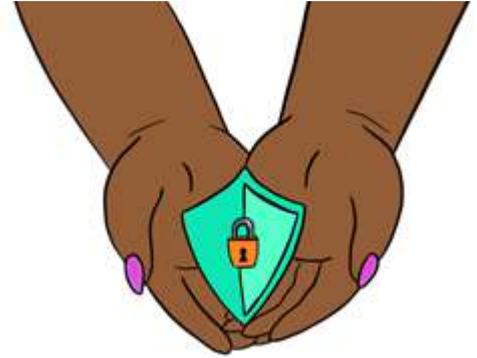
Having closed selection processes prevents women with weaker networks or grass-roots movements from being a part of opportunities that could have lasting impacts on them and the lives of their communities.

## IMPACT FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE SAFE SISTERS PROGRAM

Using purposive sampling, the researchers spoke to nine (9) women who had previously participated in the Safe Sisters training program from across all three cohorts. Of these nine women, five had started their own non-profit organizations working at the intersection of gender, technology, and digital safety. The four other women



worked for civil society organizations actively engaged in topics of bridging the digital gender divide and promoting digital safety and freedoms. For some of these women, participation in Safe Sisters was the encouragement and motivation they needed to kickstart their initiatives. For others, they had just begun their initiatives and found Safe Sisters to be the stepping stone to accelerating the growth of their organizations, in terms of access to upskilling, resources, and mentorship.



*"Previously, I had no real-world experience. I came out of this program with strong connections. I have something I can add to my CV which helps me out as a freelancer when I apply for opportunities. When I spoke about quitting my job and working on digital security full-time, I was supported. The trainers gave me tips on how to improve my presentation style. Other Safe Sisters are so outgoing and can talk and are not scared to apply for things. I didn't think I could apply, but they motivated me to!"*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters, Cohort 1

A majority of these Safe Sisters alumni have since participated in global conferences, both as speakers and attendees. They have continued to seek out additional opportunities, such as the Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) certification and Internews' Security Auditing Framework and Evaluation Template for Advocacy Groups (SAFETAG) training — much of which is offered by DefendDefenders — as well as seeking graduate level degrees in their home countries and abroad.

In terms of income, Safe Sisters has provided a clear advantage to all the alumni interviewed. From both their organizations and individual consultancies, the alumni have been able to increase their income with the skills and credentials obtained during the Safe Sisters training program. Several of the organizations started by the Safe Sisters are funded by larger partner organizations such as DefendDefenders to continue training women HRDs, journalists, activists, and persons living in underserved communities, such as rural areas.

*"There is a huge difference before and after my participation in the Safe Sisters program. My competency has really risen. I have become an experienced digital security trainer. Zaina Foundation now has five employees working full-time. We have a permanent office in a building that we own. We have transport. We are comfortable. We have all the necessary tools to succeed."*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters, Cohort 1

Full Safe Sisters profiles can be found on [page 31](#).

# MAPPING OUT SUCCESSFUL TECHNIQUES AND METHODOLOGIES FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

Four main training methodologies were repeatedly emphasized for contributing to the success of the Safe Sisters program.

- 1. Pre-training material:** A majority of participants found the pre-training content useful and practical, especially those who were completely new to digital security. Some participants struggled to access the content and complete the course work due to poor internet connectivity and there was a request to facilitate the completion of the course work offline.
- 2. Participant presentations:** All participants appreciated the inclusion of the learners in presenting on key topic areas on digital security. This enabled them to master the content and to improve their presentation skills. This also improved the cohesion of the participants in the program and helped break the ice.
- 3. Interactive exercises and games:** Several participants interviewed commented on the interactive and participatory nature of the training. There were comments regarding the use of Kahoot, energizing icebreaker games, and games that were used as practical examples of abstract digital security concepts.
- 4. Soft skills guest trainers:** Participants appreciated additional soft skill training provided by the Safe Sisters program, including public speaking, proposal writing, and research methodologies. There were further requests to provide more instruction in grant and proposal writing.

*“And the other thing that worked for me was when we had this discussion on helping us through the process of writing the proposal. What is expected of the proposal, how to come up with a proposal idea, where to look for funding and they came up with very good references, and organizations we could approach for support. And to me, because I was not that skilled, after that I felt it was very important for me to understand the nitty gritty when it comes to such things as proposal writing.”*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters Cohort 3

Finally, although many alumni have sought additional training after graduating from the Safe Sisters fellowship, there are limited opportunities for continued education, especially considering countries such as Sudan or Burundi. Even within better funded education ecosystems such as Uganda or Kenya, there is a desire for more training opportunities and workshops from the alumni.

## INCLUSION OF MEN IN FUTURE PROGRAMMING

Most participants interviewed were opposed to the idea of including men in the Safe Sisters program. Alumni reported a feeling of safety and openness in a woman-only environment. They felt safe to talk about intimate issues such as pregnancy and breastfeeding, while also discussing course content related to online gender-based violence and the experiences of women in digital spaces.

*"It's a safe, sister space. We can come out of our bubbles and not worry about the patriarchy. Women need this space. We want to breathe. To be in space where there is no judgement. We can collaborate with people with the same mission and vision. The effort women put into pulling each up is beautiful, women intentionally supporting one another. You pay it forward."*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters Cohort 2

Participants reported that in mixed-gendered workshops, they feel unable to truly confront the problems and solutions related to online gender-based violence, and that it often feels they are simply skimming the surface of the topic rather than taking a deep dive in to confront patriarchy and resulting oppressions.

Only two out of the nine Safe Sisters alumni interviewed were open to the idea of including men in the programming so as to educate them and build awareness on

**Figure 6.** Safe Sisters and trainers practice physical self-defense in a training session.





**Figure 7.** Participants practicing training skills for the group.

topics of gender-based violence and how the patriarchy manifests in digital spaces. Alumni were also open to using their skills to train both genders, such as in their grant projects.

*"I think we should include men in the training. I have implemented two trainings with DefendDefenders and it was both males and females and I covered the cyber security part as a Safe Sister. I also think men should be included because a very big part of the online harassment and OGBV and cyber security issues come from men. So, they have to be more educated about it and they have to know that there are laws and people can go and they suffer the consequences."*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters

The overall consensus leans towards keeping Safe Sisters as a women-only program. The benefits, perspectives of trust and safety, and the bonds formed in the Safe Sisters fellowship outweigh any potential impact of including men in this space.

*"I strongly feel that men are the biggest cause of online violence. They are the ones that attack us. So, when we form a group and want to protect ourselves, because the men can get the resources they need unlike us, the women, so why should we involve them in our safe space? I want to talk to a fellow woman who will understand what I am going through! Not to someone who is making me go through what I am going through."*

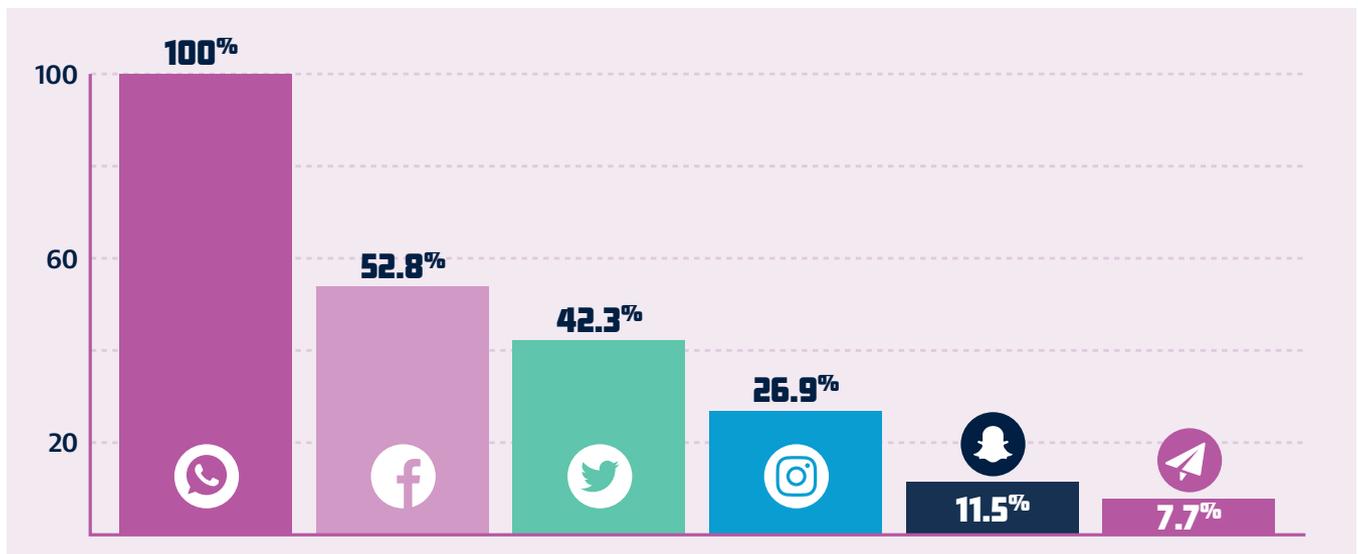
— Alumnae of Safe Sisters

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH ONLINE VIOLENCE IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

The results of the pilot digital security situational analysis revealed that digital safety training is badly needed for feminist activists in Anglophone Cameroon. The full report on the needs assessment conducted in Anglophone Cameroon can be found in the Appendix on page 52, but the key findings are below:

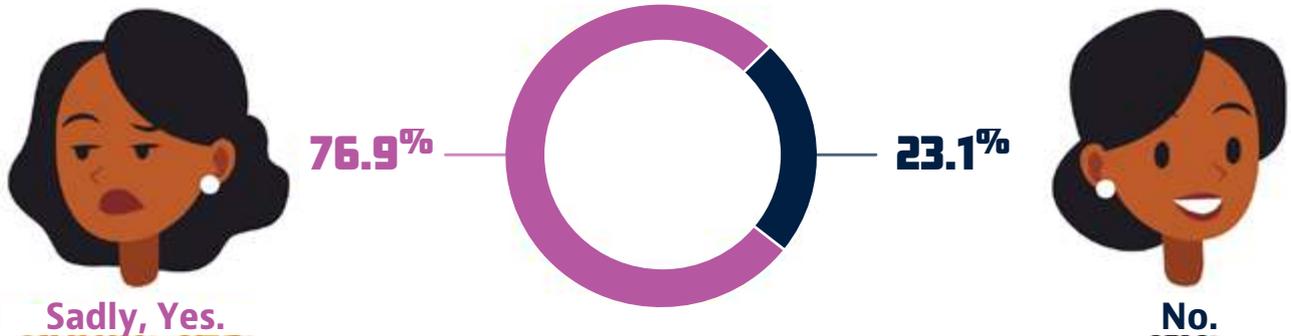
**Education:** Forty-two percent (42%) of the respondents were between the age of 26-35 years. The overall demographic of participants was skewed towards a higher education attainment level. Forty-six percent (46%) of participants had a Bachelor's degree and another 42% had listed postgraduate as their highest level of education. Forty-six percent reported working for a Non-governmental/Non-profit Organization.

**Internet use:** Ninety-six percent (96%) of women surveyed reported using a personal mobile phone to access the internet with the majority (77%) reporting going online for more than three hours a day.



WhatsApp was the most popular social media platform used by the women who participated in the survey. This was followed by Facebook (54%), Twitter (42%), and Instagram (27%).

**Have you experienced online harassment?**

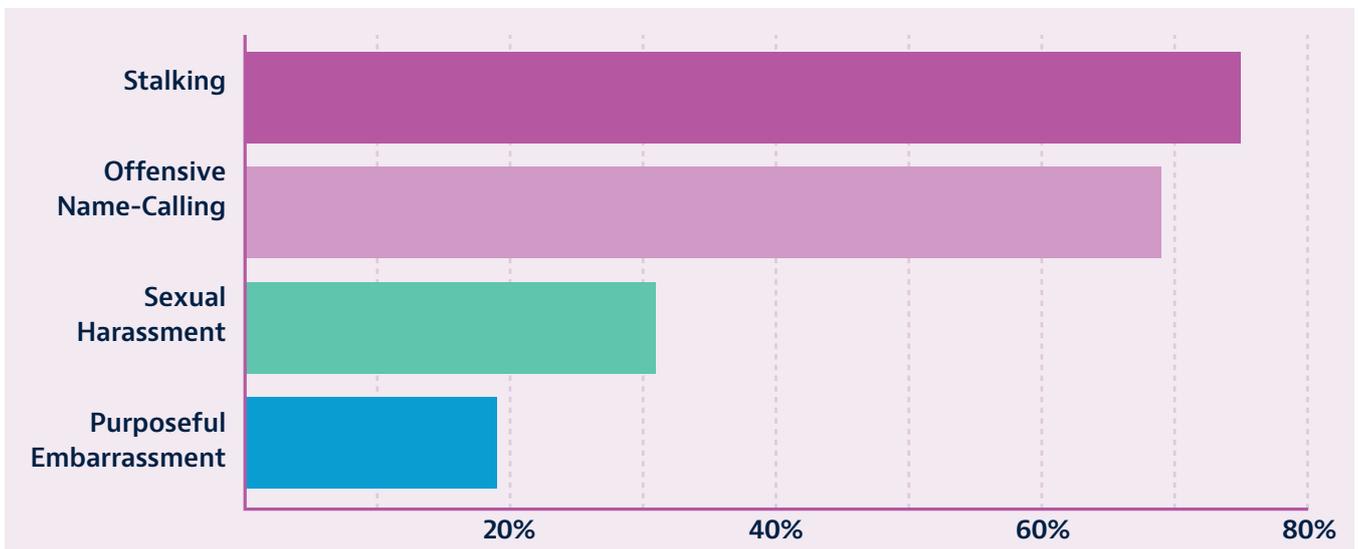


**Concern about online safety:** When asked about their concern regarding safety on the internet, the majority (81%) mentioned that they were either very concerned (50%) or moderately concerned (31%) about their safety in digital spaces. When asked whether they feel safe when voicing their opinions in online spaces, 15% were not sure, 15% didn't feel safe, 35% reported that sometimes they felt safe while 35% reported that they feel safe voicing their opinions in online spaces. Blackmail, hacking, lack of privacy, scamming, and hate speech were some of the risks or challenges respondents perceived for persons using the internet in their regions.

**92% of participants reported that their attitude towards safety online had changed over the past 5 years, with the reason being that they were either victims or witnesses to an online attack.**

A large proportion of participants (92%) reported that their attitude towards safety online has either significantly or slightly changed over the past five years. The reasons for this change in attitude were reported as either having been victims or having witnessed an online attack.

**What kind of online harassment have you personally experienced?**



**Experiences of online gender-based violence (GBV):** Seventy-seven percent (77%) of women reported having experienced online harassment. These incidents manifested as stalking (75%), such as repeated contact to cause fear through calls and doxing; sexual harassment (69%), such as unwelcome sexual advances; and purposeful embarrassments (31%), such as revenge porn and offensive name-calling (19%).

Seventy-three percent (73%) of the respondents believe that they were targeted because of their gender. Most victims of cyber blackmail in Cameroon are women (Bonny, 2020).

**Responding to online GBV:** Eighty-five percent (85%) of the women responded by blocking perpetrators of online violence. Fifty-five percent (55%) ignored the perpetrator whereas 35% reported the perpetrator to the website/platform or adjusted their privacy settings.

77% of women reported having experienced online harassment, including incidents involving stalking and sexual harassment.

**Online safety knowledge:** Eighty-one percent (81%) were not aware of any laws in place to protect themselves against online violence and 40% rated their knowledge about digital security tools and practices poor or below average. On digital self-care, 19% reported using the same password for different websites and social media accounts. Twenty-three percent (23%) mentioned never changing their online account passwords. Thirty-one (31%) percent were not aware about two-factor authentication (2FA). Only twenty-three percent (23%) reported using a VPN and 15% reported using an updated antivirus program.

**Are you aware of any laws to protect internet users against online violence in Cameroon?**



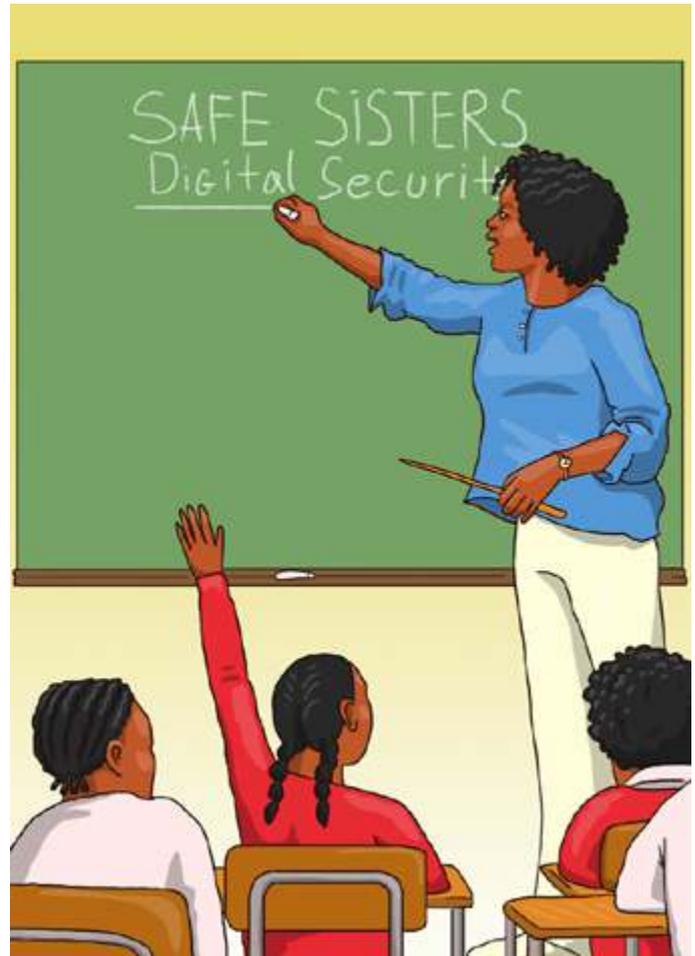
## SAFE SISTERS SUCCESS STORIES AND PROFILES

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NEW CIVIC SPACE IN ETHIOPIA

While Selamawit was running social media accounts for African feminist organizations, she came face-to-face with hackers when these accounts were compromised. She had no prior experience in digital security and was recommended to participate in the Safe Sisters digital security program by practitioners already working in this field.

This was her first opportunity to apply for a passport, visa and to travel out of her home country, Ethiopia. In the Safe Sister training program, she found a welcoming community with competent trainers, who were actively engaged in the learning success of the participants.

*"For me, learning about online gender-based violence was a very big eye opener. I have used those learning after returning home. I have been training high school girls, women journalists and human rights defenders. The entire curriculum was important, such as basic digital security and encryption, but online gender-based violence really stood out."*



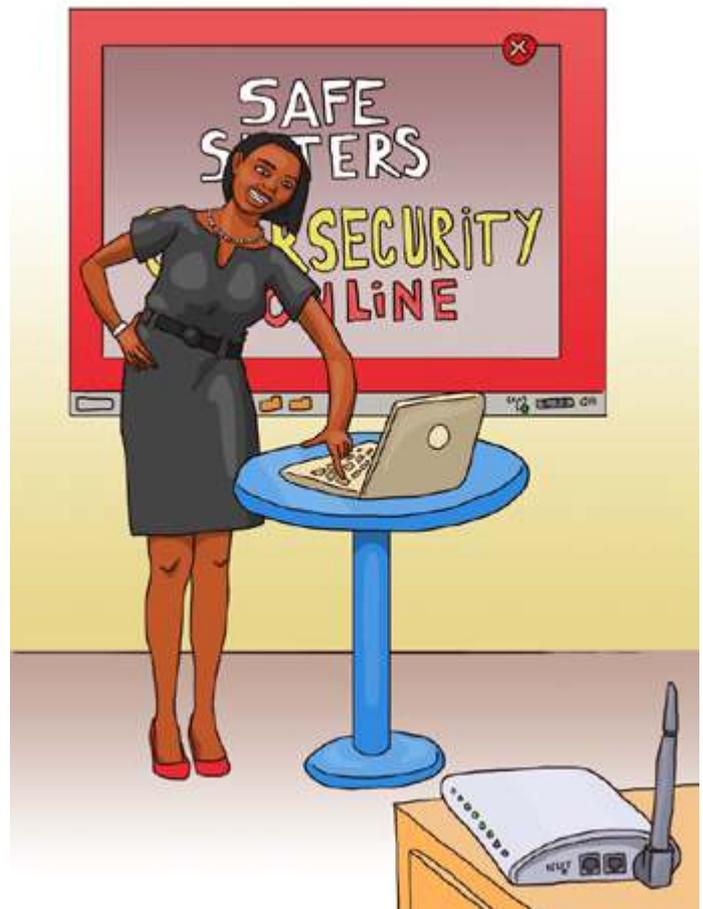
After her participation in the Safe Sister training program, Selamawit has remained in close contact with her fellow Safe Sisters. The four of them conducted their Safe Sister grant project together as well as collaborated on a research project aimed at understanding the online lived experience of women in Ethiopia through a mixed-methods research study. The Safe Sisters in Ethiopia also translated the Safe Sister digital hygiene guide into Amharic. They all remain in contact and share opportunities through social media messaging platforms. They plan to collaborate further in the future and conduct trainings together, when the opportunity arises. More importantly, the Safe Sister training program opened the doors for Selamawit which enabled her to secure her current job working with a civil society organization in Addis Ababa. She

also independently conducts digital security trainings and has secured a number of additional speaking and consulting opportunities thanks to the networks, resources and skills obtained from her participation in the program. She has been able to learn important public speaking, communication and grant writing skills. Beyond her work and consultancies, Selamawit provides pro-bono services and advice on digital security and hygiene to women's association, rotary clubs and high schools across Addis Ababa.

## CREATING A JUST AND INCLUSIVE INTERNET FOR WOMXN IN UGANDA

Sandra had been working for several years in human rights advocacy and activism, specifically focusing on LGBTQ and womxn's rights. With no prior training or experience in digital security, Sandra took the plunge into the first Safe Sister training cohort to explore how to involve more queer voices in building a safer internet. She immediately felt a sense of trust, safety and fellowship from the small, but diverse group of Safe Sisters. To this day, Sandra continues to use the training content and methodologies learned from the training program in her day-to-day work, especially within topics focused on basic digital hygiene such as strong passwords and staying safe in digital spaces.

*"I really loved that there were only women in the training program. We could talk about online violence in a safe space and find solutions that work for us. Also, it was queer friendly. You could definitely tell that the trainers made an extra effort to make everyone feel safe and that their voices matter."*



Shortly after completing the Safe Sisters training program, Sandra set up a nonprofit organization called Her Internet which seeks to equip women with digital literacy and cyber security information and skills for increased and safer online engagement, while contributing to the objectives of the feminist movement. She has been working on a number of training programs in collaboration with and funded by organizations across

Uganda that are working at the intersection of human rights, feminist movements and governance. Safe Sisters provided a template for Sandra to continue training womxn on digital literacy and digital security, especially in underserved communities and rural areas.

For Sandra, the Safe Sisters training program went beyond just digital security. It equipped her with the skills to become a better trainer, leader and champion for digital rights. According to Sandra, the training was structured in a way to encourage participants to hone their presentation and communication skills, which has continued to benefit her work and enabled her to seek new opportunities. Her Internet now leads on the critical discourse towards creating an equal and just internet through community dialogues, research as well as online and offline engagement with a broad range of partners.

## EMPOWERING GIRLS AND WOMEN IN TANZANIA THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

In 2017, Zaituni had just founded the Zaina Foundation with the aim of empowering girls and women through digital literacy. She received information on the first cohort of the Safe Sisters digital security training program from a colleague via Whatsapp and immediately knew that this was an opportunity to build networks, resources and mentorship for her new non-profit organization.

Previously, Zaituni had studied cybersecurity at university and was utilizing these skills to train students across a number of schools. She was ecstatic when she was accepted to the Safe Sisters digital security training program and received the pre-training material, links and tools in preparation for the in-person meeting in Kampala.

She found that the content of the training was vast, and yet had a strong focus on the needs of women. The language was clear, simple and easy to understand. Zaituni continues to use the learnings from the training program such as online violence,



encryption and password management in the curricula for the training programs she organizes across Tanzania. She has successfully been running the Zaina Foundation, and also conducts consultancies as an expert practitioner.

*“There is a huge difference before and after my participation in the Safe Sisters program. My competency has really risen. I have become an experienced digital security trainer. Zaina Foundation now has five employees working full-time. We have permanent office in a building that we own. We have transport. We are comfortable. We have all the necessary tools to succeed.”*

Most importantly, Safe Sisters has led to lifelong friendships and colleagues. The Tanzanian fellows started a Safe Sister chapter in Tanzania and have been advocating for digital rights, collaborating on training opportunities and share resources as well as opportunities with one another. Zaituni and the other Fellows translated the Safe Sister guide into Swahili and she plays a prominent role in translating tools into Swahili with the Localization Lab. In 2019, Zaituni was a recipient of the [Human Rights Heroes Award](#) at the biggest global gathering on internet freedom, RightsCon, which took place in Tunis that year.

There are still very few organizations focused on internet freedom and digital rights in Tanzania due to the current regulatory framework and ongoing censorship and curtailing of civil society activities in the country. Defending human rights has become a risk in the Tanzanian context. Zaina Foundation plays a critical role in supporting women who are journalists, human rights defenders, technologists, lawyers, and students to improve the way they protect their information online.

## **BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GENDER DIVIDE IN UGANDA**

After hearing rave reviews from a Safe Sister fellow from the first cohort, Aidah was excited to apply for the Safe Sister digital security training program as soon as the call for applications was released. Though Aidah had a background in Computer Science, she felt that there was significant focus on the technological aspects of ICT tools and devices, and insufficient attention paid to user’s personal safety on these devices.

The Safe Sisters digital security training provided a nurturing and safe learning environment, though overwhelming at times due to the volume of content. However, Aidah believes that the Safe Sister model truly stands the test of time and can be replicated across different contexts. Aidah continues to use the curriculum to train her participants with a focus on rural and underserved communities outside of the capital city, Kampala. A topic that really resonated with Aidah was understanding the impact

of online gender-based violence. While other training programs might touch upon the subject, Safe Sisters allowed participants to really take a deep dive into the topic with empathy and to discuss the reality of experiencing this violence as a woman. The advocacy work in this area has grown tremendously over the past years and there is now significant efforts in pushing for safer internet in Uganda.

A year after participating in the Safe Sisters training, Aidah flew to the United States as part of the Mandela Young African Leadership Initiative, where she presented on the topic of digital security and received the Best Presenter award. She has since received a number of speaking opportunities where she usually educates her audience on digital security and hygiene, and the need to bridge the digital gender divide.

Another important outcome for Aidah after completion of the Safe Sisters training program was the co-founding of the AYDIA Gender and Technology Initiative (AGTI). The non-profit focuses on developing ideas to advocate 4 ICT and data solutions that promote gender inclusive technology to empower women and girls in STEM. Most recently, in the run up to the 2021 general elections in Uganda, AGTI ran a digital security training workshop for women in or seeking leadership positions in the Masaka area of Uganda.

Participating in Safe Sisters has encouraged Aidah to seek further educational opportunities and she hopes to secure a position in the Master of Digital Information Management and System Innovation program at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.



*"It's a safe, sister space. We can come out of our bubbles and not worry about the patriarchy. Women need this space. We want to breathe. To be in space where there is no judgement. We can collaborate with people with the same mission and vision. The effort women put into pulling each up is beautiful, women intentionally supporting one another. You pay it forward."*

## FROM CRIMINAL FORENSICS TO DIGITAL SECURITY IN KENYA

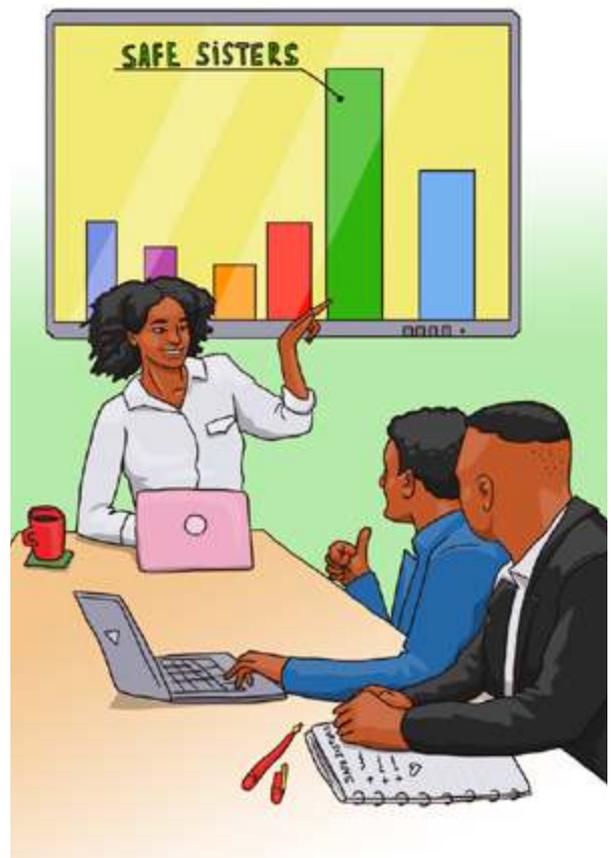
Though Mariam studied Forensics and Cybercrime with a minor in Criminal Justice, there were few opportunities to practice in the Kenyan context. Mariam then pivoted to working on IT and Safe Sister presented a unique opportunity that was the first of its kind in the region. Mariam had previously hesitated from applying for opportunities due to the essay requirements in the applications. However, Safe Sister provided a simple application form which encouraged Miriam to put forward her application.

In the training program, Mariam found like-minded women who were enthusiastic, passionate and interested in learning. The trainers were knowledgeable, explained all the content proficiently through participatory methodologies and were committed to making participants feel at ease, even when discussing complex themes. The training was also instrumental in helping Mariam build her confidence in public speaking, presentation and networking.

Fellow Safe Sisters have continued to be a source of inspiration, encouragement and motivation. Mariam has remained in contact with Safe Sisters from her cohort. With a strong background in cybersecurity, participating in Safe Sisters inspired her to seek additional education opportunities such as preparing for the Certified Information Systems Auditor certification.

*“Previously, I had no real world experience. I came out of this program with strong connections. I have something I can add to my CV which helps me out as a freelancer when I apply for opportunities. When I spoke about quitting my job and working on digital security full-time, I was supported. The trainers gave me tips on how to improve my presentation style. Other Safe Sisters are so outgoing and can talk and are not scared to apply for things. I didn’t think I could apply, but they motivated me to!”*

Mariam also founded ARC Techies, based in Mombasa, Kenya, with two other women colleagues. ARC Techies seeks to empower marginalized communities with technology solutions to solve their problems. They provide internet solutions, digital security trainings, data management and web/mobile development. Mariam works specifically to understand how to get critical mass buy-in from users in using digital security tools by focusing on hands-on training experiences.



# DISCUSSION

## CHALLENGES AND ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

A few challenges were identified over the course of the interviews.

### CHALLENGE #1: LOGISTICS

Some of the interviewees were dissatisfied with the accommodation provided by the program. In Cohort 3, several participants fell ill with food poisoning and had to miss portions of the training due to unsanitary food preparation at the hotel. Some participants were uncomfortable with sharing accommodation with other participants whom they had not met before. There were also complaints about the compensation offered for transportation to the venue, with claims that the money provided was insufficient to cover the fare to and from the venue.

### CHALLENGE #2: CHOICE OF TRAINERS

A few participants had challenges with the trainers in Cohort 3. While no names were mentioned, there were issues of openness and empathy that were raised. It is worthwhile to investigate further how to improve the participant experience working with competent trainers.

### CHALLENGE #3: APPLICATION PROCESS

During the FGD, two out of nine alumni of the programs raised concerns that the application process might be deemed too technical by potential applicants with no prior experience in digital security.

*"On the application process, I remember it was tough. It was a bit tedious. It took me, I think, three days to finish the whole application, but it has paid off."*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters

*"The process was quite intense, but I have had more tough ones. I liked the process because it made me think outside the box. I was able to sit and reason why I want to be part of this whole initiative."*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters

The other seven Safe Sisters alumni interviewed found the application process to be straightforward and easy. One participant was able to fill out the application on their mobile phone. Another participant said that the data captured was appropriate and no unnecessary questions were presented on the application form. Based on this data, it is difficult to make a conclusive judgement on the difficulty level of the application process.

**Figure 8.** Safe Sisters trainer, Natasha Msonza, introduces the Safe Sisters' Digital Safety Trainer's Assistant to the group, a guide that they can keep open while they learn to train.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## IMPROVING SAFE SISTERS PROGRAM

There are several opportunities and suggestions raised by alumni on how to improve the Safe Sisters program.

### OPPORTUNITY #1: ONGOING SUPPORT

A suggestion made by one of the interviewees was to open up the small grants programs to alumni from all Safe Sisters cohorts and to increase the value of the grants available. This would enable Safe Sisters to continue their work, especially with underserved communities, and for those alumni who might not be successful at grant writing and networking for fundraising opportunities.

### OPPORTUNITY #2: TRAINING REVIEW AND MENTORSHIP

Safe Sisters alumni reported that they would benefit from active mentorship in providing feedback on their training and presentation skills. This includes having an expert trainer sit in on their sessions and provide customized guidance in how they could improve their interaction with participants, explaining the content or communication styles.

*"I believe in mentorship. We might be good, but we are good in our own eyes. It would be interesting if we can have different opinions about how we are doing and also, if we can have somebody to groom us. Someone who will make you a better version of you. So, maybe Internews can get us different mentors and not necessarily under Safe Sisters, but they can be able to get us independent experts who will be able to guide us."*

— Alumnae of Safe Sisters

### OPPORTUNITY #3: CURRICULUM ADJUSTMENT

The majority of the alumni interviewed benefited most from learning basic digital hygiene and about online GBV. Topics that were least appreciated were password management and encryption. Alumni reported low uptake of tools such as Mailvelope. Additional comments were made on dropping out course content on 'how the internet works' as the topic is too vast to adequately cover in a 1-week training and takes away from precious time that could be used on more interesting topics.

## OPPORTUNITY #4: LOGISTICS

The Safe Sisters planning team should exercise more caution when choosing venues for the workshops to pick places with common areas that foster more networking, with cleaner standards for food preparation, etc. Adequate funds should be budgeted for the participants' transportation to the venue.

## OPPORTUNITY #5: MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SAFE SISTERS TRAINING AND THE PROGRAMS FUNDED BY THE SAFE SISTERS GRANTS

It would be beneficial for the Safe Sisters planning team to have more data on the knowledge about digital safety from the participants prior to, immediately after, and a few months after the conclusion of the training program. More robust data on the outcomes of the programs run by Safe Sisters with the grant funds would also be beneficial in both supporting the Safe Sisters alumni to improve their training or program management skills, and in better tailoring the Safe Sisters curriculum to these needs.

This could similarly include gender-disaggregated pre-post data from the participants of the Safe Sisters' grant programs, needs assessments or risk mapping, and any changes in attitudes or behavior after the programs were implemented. It would also be helpful for Safe Sisters planning team staff, mentors, or other similar consultants to sit in on these trainings for quality assurance purposes. For example, if the program is a training, is the correct information being conveyed; is the instructor confident and knowledgeable; is the environment set up in a way that promotes openness and trust?

## IMPROVING THE SAFE SISTERS CURRICULUM

The Digital Safety Trainer's Assistant Guide is a short and comprehensive guide for a new trainer educating participants on basic digital hygiene and security. The guide is easy to understand and well-laid out. There are helpful and practical instructions and tips.

There are few areas for improvement in the curriculum, considering new threats and trends.

- 1. Securing social media accounts:** Given that most digital security trainers may not have funds and/or time to conduct multi-day training, it is important to focus on some of the basics that are most likely to impact participants. The guide states that the trainer could walk the participant through Security and

Privacy settings on Facebook, for example. However, it would be pertinent to expound further on this section. For example, selective blocking, muting, geotagging, etc., can go a long way in keeping users safe (and sane).

- 2. Remote working and teleconferencing:** Now that much of work has moved to online spaces, it is important to add content that is related to keeping virtual meeting places safe; for example, how to avoid “Zoom bombings” through the use of waiting rooms, password-protecting, host security features, disabling file-sharing, etc.
- 3. Exploring sexuality and pleasure in online spaces:** It could be worthwhile, as a program aimed at women, to explore how women can be safe in online spaces while at the same time explore sexuality and pleasure. For example, how to send intimate images in a safe and consensual manner.

## INCORPORATING THE DIGITAL SECURITY SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS AHEAD OF NEW SAFE SISTERS PROGRAMS

The digital security situational analysis questionnaire is an appropriate tool to rapidly collect information on the knowledge, attitude, and practices related to digital hygiene and security in countries across Africa. The data from the questionnaire provides a snapshot which enables the development of digital security training programs.

The data collected through the digital security situational analysis is a very helpful first step to gain a better understanding of the threats that women in any country or community face online. The assessment should ideally be administered by a local trusted feminist activist or women’s media organization as the first step of the Safe Sisters rollout in a new country, as the information that is collected through the assessment will help the program team localize the Safe Sisters program for that country.

**In Cameroon,** a high proportion of women in the Anglophone regions face online violence and are increasingly concerned about their safety in digital spaces. However, many of these respondents are unaware of any legal protections offered to them. Additionally, they believe that they lack the appropriate knowledge to protect themselves in these digital spaces. Results from the situational analysis show that there is a significant need for training programs aimed at building digital security awareness and digital hygiene skills.

# CONCLUSION

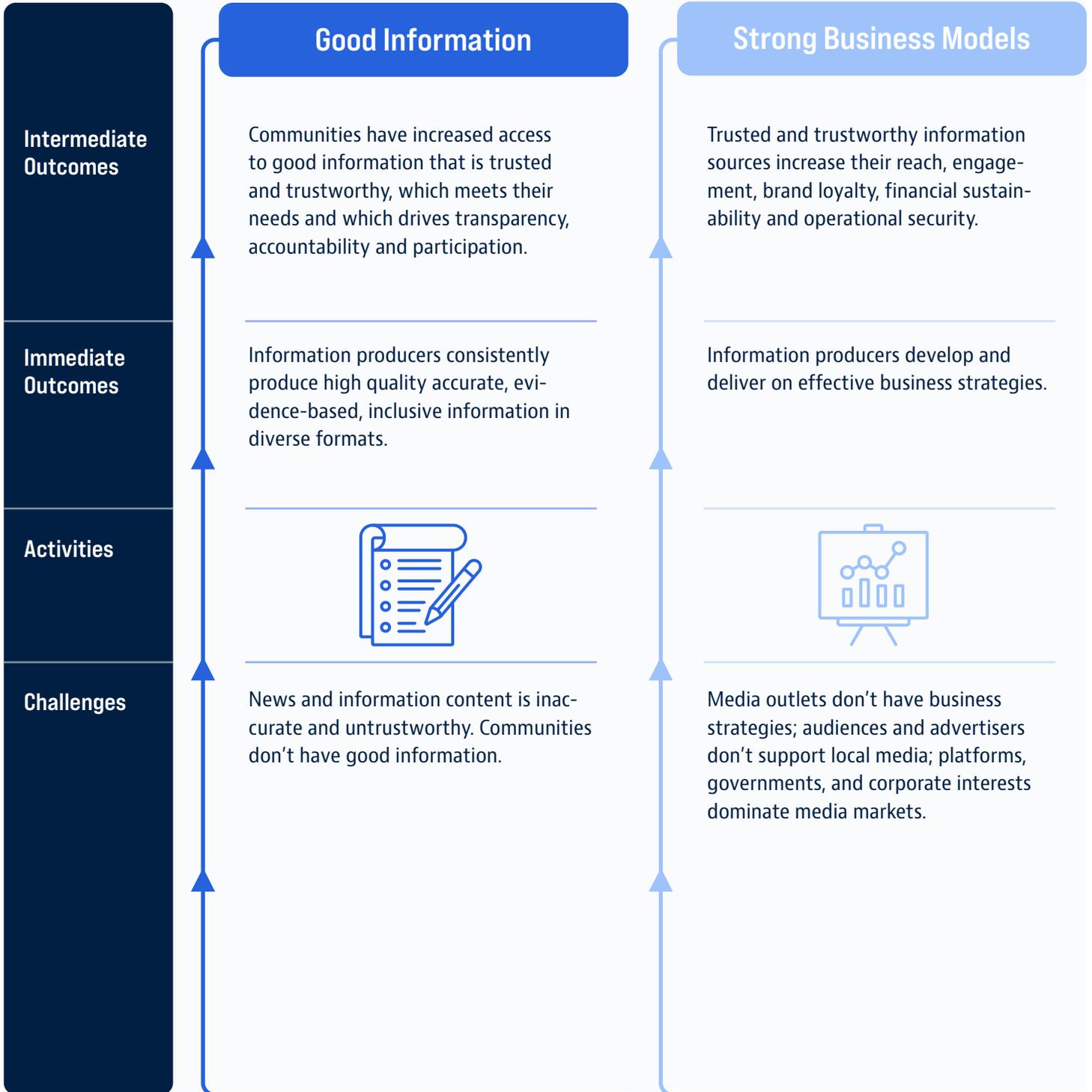
Safe Sisters digital safety training is a highly effective program for women in East Africa. Alumni from this program have started their own digital security and ICT-related initiatives, they have increased their income through digital security trainings, and they have sought further educational opportunities to increase their skills in the areas of digital and cybersecurity. Furthermore, there is significant impact on the communities that these Safe Sisters occupy, such as LGBTQ+ communities, feminist communities, underserved/rural communities, etc.

**Figure 9.**  
Participant-led training  
on password security.



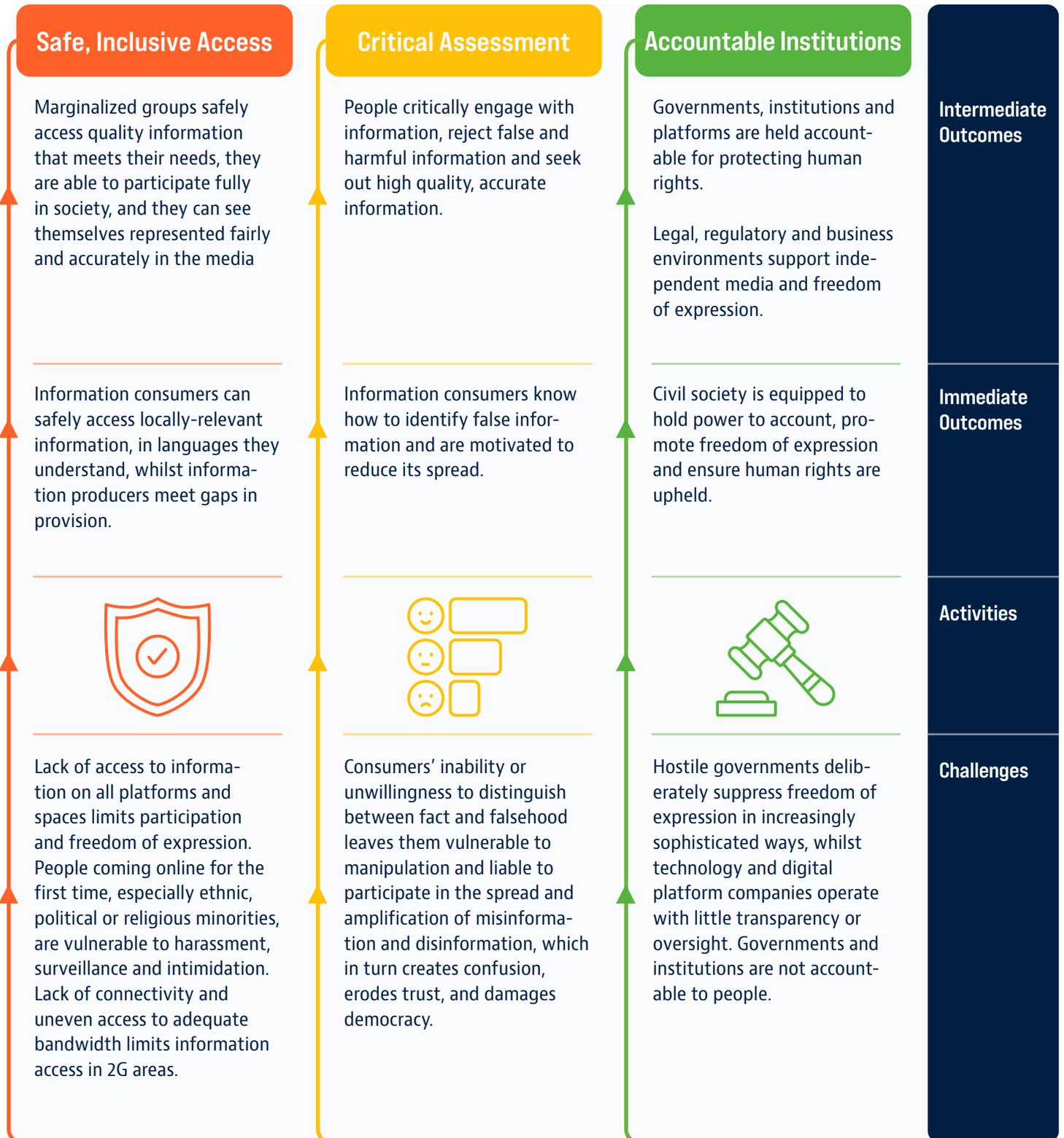
# INTERNEWS THEORY OF CHANGE

**Impact:** Healthy information environments enable everyone to make better-informed decisions, bridge divides, participate more fully in their communities, and hold power to account.



**Problem Statement:** In an unhealthy information environment, people are unable to make informed choices, false and hateful information divides communities, citizen participation in civic life declines and the structures for holding power to account are weakened.

# INTERNEWS THEORY OF CHANGE



- Assumptions:**
- Internews has the financial, technical and human resources to achieve significant reach and operate in every setting where this work is needed.
  - Media and information providers share Internews' commitment to high quality, accurate, evidence-based, inclusive information and are open to collaboration.
  - The existence of shared global norms continue to value freedom of expression and independent media.
  - High quality information acts as a driver of positive change.

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# APPENDICES

# SAFE SISTERS FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONNAIRE

## CONSENT

Do you agree to participate in this research study to measure the impact of the Safe Sisters Digital Security Training? This research is aimed at providing substantial evidence on the benefits, drawbacks, and potential for improvement of this training program. Some of the questions may be personal in nature; your participation is optional and there will be no physical risk or harm to you by participating in the survey. While there are no immediate benefits to you, your participation will provide information that will help to ensure that future participants of this program, as well as the communities they work with as activists, human rights defenders and journalists, are able to benefit from the programs Internews offers. All the information that you will provide in this assessment will purely be used for only this assessment purpose and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality as no one else will know how you responded to any questions. Kindly allow me (us) to take 45-60 minutes of your time to interact with you.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

1. How did you first hear about the Safe Sister/[OTHER] digital security training?  
How would you describe the application process to participate in the training?  
Why were you interested in participating in this digital security training?

## COURSE CONTENT

2. How would you describe the content and quality of the training that you received throughout the training course?  
*Probe: language used in the training, competency of trainers, mode of training, facilities, etc.*
3. Which thematic areas or modules did you find most relevant or interesting during the course, and why?
4. Which thematic areas or modules did you find least relevant or interesting during the course, and why?
5. Did you face any challenges during the training course?  
*Probe: in terms of content, logistics, peers, cultural differences, costs, etc.*
6. Did you find that the format of the training created a safe and engaging space to learn and network? Why or why not? Have you remained in contact with your peers from your training cohort?  
*Probe: women trainers, networking, business relationships, collaborations,*

*co-creating proposals, etc.*

7. Did your expectations for the course match the actual outcomes from the training course? Please explain why or why not.
8. What aspects of the Safe Sisters/[OTHER] training methodology were important to you? What do you think the trainers and organizers did particularly well? What do you think they did not do well?

*Probe: in terms of applicability, creativity, usefulness, etc.*

### **INCOME GENERATION, EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES, AND LIFE SKILLS**

9. Have you participated in any digital security training before, or after, your participation in Safe Sisters? How would you compare this other training to the Safe Sisters training?
10. Have any specific skills or competencies acquired through the training course contributed towards your career progression, income generation, or funding opportunities, specifically? What kinds of activities related to digital security have you participated in upon completion of the training? For example, have you conducted any training of your own on the topic of digital security? Have there been any challenges in using these skills towards career progression, income generation, or funding opportunities? Have you been able to overcome these challenges?
11. Have any specific skills or competencies acquired through the training course contributed towards your ability to seek additional educational opportunities? If so, what were the skills or competencies that you learned? Also, what additional opportunities have you sought? Have there been any challenges in using these skills towards seeking educational opportunities? Were you able to overcome these challenges?
12. What additional skills or benefits did you obtain over the course of training? How have you used these skills in your day-to-day life?  
*Probe: Interpersonal skills, leadership skills, confidence building, self-efficacy, and/or individual agency.*
13. In your opinion, what were any gaps within the training curriculum? What could the trainers and organization staff have done differently to improve your experience as a learner and a practitioner in digital security?

# SAFE SISTERS KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

## CONSENT

Do you agree to participate in this research study to measure the impact of the Safe Sisters Digital Security Training? This research is aimed at providing substantial evidence on the benefits, drawbacks, and potential for improvement of this training program. Some of the questions may be personal in nature, your participation is optional, and there will be no physical risk or harm to you by participating in the survey. While there are no immediate benefits to you, your participation will provide information that will help to ensure that future participants of this program — as well as the communities they work with such as activists, human rights defenders and journalists — are able to benefit from the programs offered by Internews. All the information that you will provide in this assessment will purely be used for only this assessment purpose and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality as no one else will know how you responded to any questions. Kindly allow me (us) to take 30-45 minutes of your time to interact with you.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

1. How did you first hear about the Safe Sisters Digital Security Training? Why were you interested in participating in this digital security training?
2. Had you participated in any type of digital safety training before Safe Sisters? If so, what type of training was it (and who [individual or organization] was it run or hosted by)? Have you participated in any type of digital safety training (as a participant) after Safe Sisters ended? If so, what type of training was it (and who [individual or organization] was it run or hosted by)?
3. How would you describe the application process to participate in the training?
4. Did you face any challenges or barriers before, during, or after submitting your application to participate in the course?  
*Probe: in terms of personal doubts or fears, application form, access to devices, family perceptions, cultural barriers*

## COURSE CONTENT

5. How would you describe the content and quality of the training that you received throughout the training course?  
*Probe: language used in the training, competency of trainers, mode of training, facilities, etc.*

6. Which thematic areas or modules did you find most relevant or interesting during the course, and why?
7. Which thematic areas or modules did you find least relevant or interesting during the course, and why?
8. Did you face any challenges during the training course?  
Probe: in terms of content, logistics, peer, cultural differences, costs, etc.
9. Did you find that the format of the training created a safe and engaging space to learn and network? Why or why not? Have you remained in contact with your peers from your training cohort?  
*Probe: women trainers, networking, business relationships, collaborations, co-creating proposals, etc.*
10. Did your expectations for the training match the actual outcomes from the training offered? Please explain why or why not.
11. What aspects of the Safe Sisters training methodology were important to you? What do you think the trainers and organizers did particularly well? What do you think they did not do well? If you participated in digital security trainings offered by other organizations, what key differences did you observe between the Safe Sisters training methodology compared to other offerings?  
*Probe: in terms of applicability, creativity, usefulness, etc.*

### **INCOME GENERATION, EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES, AND LIFE SKILLS**

12. Do you feel that your participation in Safe Sisters has led to new educational or income generating activities?
13. What kinds of activities related to digital security have you participated in upon completion of the training? Have any specific skills or competencies acquired through the training course contributed towards your career progression, income generation, or funding opportunities, specifically? Have there been any challenges in using these skills towards income generation or funding opportunities? Have you been able to overcome these challenges?
14. Have any specific skills or competencies acquired through the training course contributed towards your ability to seek additional educational opportunities? If so, what were the skills or competencies that you learned? Also, what additional opportunities have you sought? Have there been any challenges in using these skills towards seeking educational opportunities? Were you able to overcome these challenges?

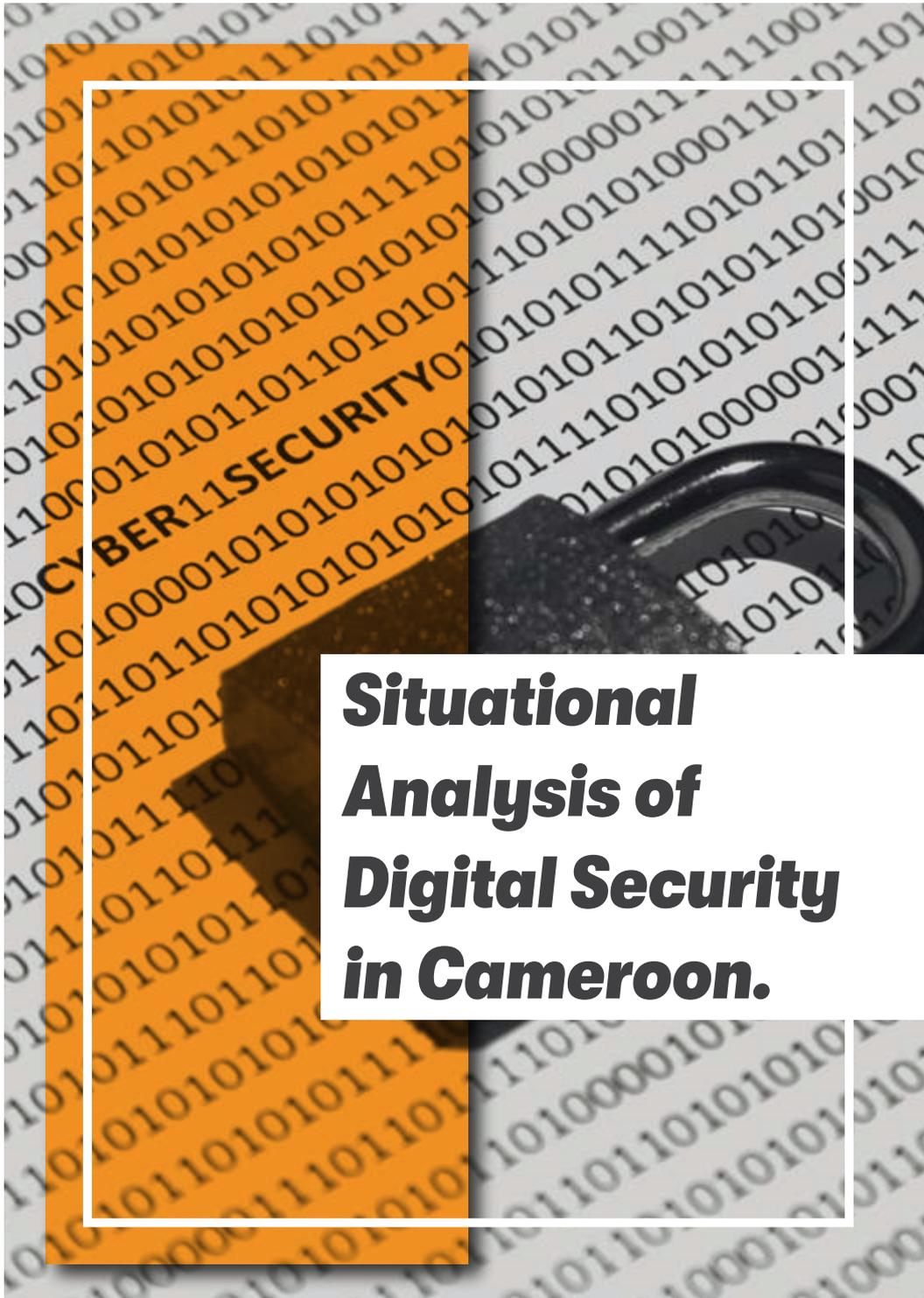
15. What additional skills or benefits did you obtain over the course of training? How have you used these skills in your day-to-day life?  
*Probe: Interpersonal skills, leadership skills, confidence building, self-efficacy and/or individual agency.*
16. Imagine that you have the opportunity and funding to develop a digital security training course from scratch for your target audience or community. What key elements would you be sure to include in this training course? What might you do differently from the current structure of Safe Sisters training?  
*Probe: What were any gaps within the training curriculum? What could the trainers and organization staff have done differently to improve their experience as a learner and a practitioner in digital security*
17. What further training would you hope to receive in the future, from Internews or other organizations?

#### **PROGRAM IMPACT**

18. Can you describe the impact in your community from the content you and your colleagues have learned during the Safe Sisters digital security training? How would you describe the impact of the work conducted by your Safe Sisters peer and alumni, in general, in your community? *This could be increased awareness, better practices, or stronger networks amongst your target audience.*
19. How might men be incorporated into the Safe Sisters program for future training?

# SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL SECURITY IN CAMEROON

Link to full report [here](#).



## **Situational Analysis of Digital Security in Cameroon.**