

# Leading Digital Innovations with an Equity Lens: Gender and Digital at Pathfinder



Digital health innovation, digital technology, and specifically digital health, is transforming how people access and manage their well-being. Photo: Sarah Peck

## Introduction

Digital technologies have the potential to transform the global health landscape by addressing gender-specific challenges and promoting women's health and empowerment. At Pathfinder International, we have incorporated digital technology into our programs for well over a decade, within health systems and at the community level. We have taken advantage of digital technologies, where appropriate, to improve clinical decision making, increase access and uptake of health services, and strengthen health systems for the delivery of reproductive health, family planning, and HIV services offered in the countries where we work.

To harness the benefits of digital technology, it is crucial to address the digital gender divide. Women and girls, particularly in low-resource settings, may face barriers to accessing and using technologies, such as limited digital literacy, lack of connectivity, or restricted access to devices.

Bridging this divide requires efforts to promote digital literacy, provide affordable and accessible technology, and address social and cultural barriers. Gender norms affect women's and girls' mobility, restrict their access to financial and other resources, hinder their participation in activities outside the home, and limit their decision-making.

By focusing on gender as a lens in the development and implementation of digital health solutions, we can achieve better health outcomes for women and girls and contribute to the broader goal of achieving gender equity in health care on a global scale.



In Bangladesh, community health workers use mobile apps to help facilitate their work. Image: Pathfinder Bangladesh.

## Innovation & Approach

### Using a Gender-Responsive Design

Pathfinder employs agile development and human-centered design approaches, with a strong emphasis on co-design and user testing. Our gender-responsive design creates technology solutions that consider the needs and topics relevant to gender, including maternal and reproductive health, mental health, nutrition, and gender-based violence. In the design of applications, we use imagery and content that avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes:

- Offering discrete access to information and resources related to sexual health, contraception, and reproductive rights and options for tracking health parameters relevant to diverse genders, such as hormone levels or specific health conditions.
- Prioritizing user privacy and data security, especially for sensitive health information that may relate to gender identity or reproductive health and creating online support communities that are respectful and inclusive of diverse gender identities and experiences.
- Monitoring and moderating user-generated content to prevent gender-based harassment or discrimination and offering clear explanations of how user data is collected, stored, and used, empowering users to make informed choices.

### Gender-Inclusive Digital Innovations

#### USAID/Egypt Women's Economic and Social Empowerment Program

Provides women with digital financial services. This includes card-based payments, eWallets (also referred to as mWallets, mobile money, and mobile money transfer), and inclusion of the post-office, where many women in Egypt, especially those with low literacy, are most comfortable doing business.

#### YUVA: Youth Voices for Agency and Access

Piloted innovative digital technologies, job aids, and communications approaches to increase young married couples' and first-time parents' access to contraceptive information and services. Increased availability of evidence-informed resources and tools supporting contraceptive uptake among young married couples and first-time parents.

#### Shukhi Jibon

Strengthened the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's ability to provide information and services to adolescents and youth. Built up the National Institute of Population Research and Training digital classroom content as a leader in training and mentoring family planning providers using state-of-the-art curricula, training methodologies, and certification programs.

For further information on Pathfinder's Digital Innovations, reach out to Darlene Irby, Senior Director of Digital Innovations, [darlene.irby@pathfinder.org](mailto:darlene.irby@pathfinder.org).

**Pathfinder International is driven by the conviction that all people, regardless of where they live, have the right to decide whether and when to have children, to exist free from fear and stigma, and to lead the lives they choose. As a global health organization with locally led, community-driven programs, we support women to make their own reproductive health decisions. We work with local partners to advance contraceptive services, comprehensive abortion care, and young people's sexual and reproductive rights in communities around the world—including those affected by poverty, conflict, climate change, and natural disasters. Taken together, our programs enable millions of people to choose their own paths forward.**

Transform lives with us. [pathfinder.org](https://www.pathfinder.org)

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