

PROTECT

SUMMARY REPORT

**PERCEPTION SURVEY ON ROLE
AND CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN
JOURNALISTS AND WOMEN HUMAN
RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN CIVIC SPACE**



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Introduction

A survey to explore community perceptions of women journalists and women human right defenders (WHRDs) was conducted in Kenya between April and May 2021. The counties of Mombasa and Kisumu were selected because they are metropolitan regions reflecting various diversities in terms of socioeconomic, religion and ethnic characteristics, with a different cultural setting to Nairobi, and are therefore likely to be indicative of the attitudes drawing from a broader segment of the country. The sample size of the overall population who participated in this survey was 455 individuals with a margin error of +/-4%.¹



Survey findings

The survey was designed to understand how communities perceive the role of women journalists and women human rights defenders. In particular, it sought to understand the perceived competence of women journalists and HRDs in performing different roles, as well as community attitudes towards women journalists and WHRDs.

Underlying this survey was the belief that community perceptions impact the working environment of women journalists and WHRDs.

Only half of those surveyed were interested in issues related to civic space, and most of those that showed interest did so mainly in freedom of expression concerns, namely public

¹ The margin of error is a statistical measurement that accounts for the difference between actual and projected results in a random survey sample. Thus, with a margin of error, it means the actual results from the target population could be 4.5% more or less than the estimated value.



interviewed personally knew a woman journalist or a WHRD working to protect or promote human rights. The survey also showed that it is mainly the well-known TV anchors, journalists and political figures previously associated with human rights that are known to the community. Women's contribution tends to be linked to gender and children's issues, which are the areas that most women focus on. Furthermore, women's work is not as visible as they do not often organise or lead public protest and men continue to have more visibility as compared to women in both counties.

protests. This group indicated that they obtain their information primarily from traditional and mainstream media houses. However, online platforms and networks are also increasingly becoming avenues for information.

Kisumu county appeared to hold women journalists and WHRDs in higher regard as compared to Mombasa County. This may be due to the stronger commitment to supporting women rights and all the institutions working to ensure substantive representation of women's rights in Kisumu. In general, the majority of the public see value in the work carried out by women journalists and women human rights defenders, especially when it comes to the right to information. However, they also think women limit themselves by focusing on gender-based violence.

This moderate interest in civic space issues, association of freedom of expression with protests, and reliance on traditional sources of information may contribute to the low awareness about the contribution that women journalists and women human rights defenders make to protecting civic space. The survey revealed that WHRDs and women journalists were under-represented and portrayed in limited roles in the civic space and human rights spheres in general, mainly women and child rights. Results showed that just above half of those



The survey revealed a low level of respect for women journalists and WHRDs in relation to all dimensions of civic space: namely the right to access information, right



to free expression, right to assemble and the right to participate in public affairs. Those who understood the work of women journalists and WHRDs saw them as bold and courageous. A slim majority of the respondents stated they would consider recruiting a woman journalist to collect data from them to report a story. Women journalists appear to receive greater respect in Mombasa as compared to Kisumu, whereas WHRDs appear to receive more respect in Kisumu. Many believe that women journalists and WHRDs limit themselves by focusing on gender-based violence in Kisumu, and the human rights field has a wider range of choices that women can explore in order to reach their potential.

In general, most of those surveyed mentioned 'boldness/courage' and 'informed/educative' as the foremost character traits deemed desirable for women journalists and women human rights defenders. However, there was

a gap between what people expect and the attributes they think women journalists and WHRDs possess. In this regard, women journalists and HRDs are seen to fall short on fulfilling expectations.

Cultural norms, religion, family and community related factors influence the role of women journalists and WHRDs in society. At family level, beliefs are shaped by discriminatory attitudes and gender stereotyping influenced by the notion of 'female status'. In this context, 'marriage' and 'family' are seen to be the institutions that confer status for women, provided they fulfil these designated, sanctioned roles. A similar perception exists at the community level where women are expected to assume family responsibilities. In the context of culture, deep-seated patriarchal norms dictate what roles men and women must fulfil in society. WHRDs in particular face attitudinal barriers because the work of defending

human rights for all is viewed as a job for men. Religious identity is also seen to reinforce the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women in the wider community.

Based on the survey, a slight majority of respondents strongly agreed that socio-cultural barriers were an issue. For instance, in Mombasa it was perceived that women should remain at home and perform spousal duties instead of working in this field. A

comment that highlighted that these individuals face threats and family pressures which eventually hinder or discourage them from effectively carrying out their work. Attitudes of religious leaders also discourage women journalists from working. Another comment that stood out was that women journalists and WHRDs are not bold enough, resulting in poor representation of women at the frontline of this work.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is important that the public continues to support the work women journalists and WHRDs do in society, as their work opens up dual opportunities to address gender issues of concern, protecting and expanding civic space. ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa propose the following recommendation to improve the current situation of women journalists and WHRDs:

- i) Conduct a detailed and comprehensive study on discrimination and the specific attitudinal barriers that affect women journalists and WHRDs with a view to adopting appropriate measures to counter these.
- ii) Ensure inclusivity and constant sensitization on the intersecting issues that women journalists and WHRDs face, including through structural discrimination, as well as uncondusive laws and policies.
- iii) Develop awareness-raising programs to foster respect and understanding of the work of women journalists and WHRDs as part of the effort to promote awareness of civic space.
- iv) Establish affiliation or mechanisms for women journalists and WHRDs to work with human rights organisations to increase opportunities for building their capacity.



