

Going upstream

A holistic approach to ending sexual harassment against journalists



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PROTECT (Protecting Rights, Openness and Transparency Enhancing Civic Transformation) is a coalition of organisations that, since 2019, has joined forces to pursue our common vision: a free, open, and inclusive Kenya.

To achieve this vision, PROTECT empowers civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and journalists to hold the government accountable and build an independent democratic society.

For more information, visit: <https://www.article19.org/protect/>.

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PROTECT delivers holistic and mutually reinforcing solutions to create lasting change. The coalition's work on addressing workplace sexual harassment combines short-term support for victims, medium-term policy development for media houses, and longer-term work with male ambassadors to reform the policies, behaviours, and practices necessary to prevent sexual harassment.

Introduction

The Kenyan Constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to participate in society. To ensure this right is enjoyed by all, it is vital to dismantle the barriers that prevent marginalised groups, including women, from equal participation.

Workplace sexual harassment, as both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, is one of those barriers. Such harassment **causes** gender inequality by exacerbating the gender pay gap¹ and contributing to fewer women entering and remaining in the labour market. It is a **consequence** of gender inequality because it [may be used to punish or deter](#) women perceived as disobeying gender norms – whether by working outside the home at all or by entering a male-dominated profession.

Journalism is one such profession. [Worldwide](#), women who work as journalists are often seen as violating gender roles and stereotypes, and often experience harassment as a result. In Kenya, around [two-thirds of journalists are men](#), and media environments are [mainly conservative](#) in terms of cultural and religious views, resulting in women's voices and concerns being [overlooked and underrepresented](#) in the news.

A 2020 [study](#) of sexism and the press in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa found that Kenya ranked the lowest of all 3 countries in perceived newsroom equality and that sexism at work was widespread.

¹ [Studies have shown that](#) sexual harassment levels are higher in workplaces where there are more men than women, where the nature of the work is 'traditionally' male, and where men dominate leadership roles – and such work tends to be better-paid. Women who hold high-ranking positions or positions traditionally occupied by men – positions that, again, are likely to be better-paid – are also [more likely to experience sexual harassment](#). As such, the fear or reality of being sexually harassed may keep women from entering or staying in better-paid work, which contributes to the gender pay gap. (See e.g. International Labour Organization, [Sexual harassment in the world of work](#); The Fawcett Society, [Tackling sexual harassment in the workplace](#).)

Of the 40 women journalists surveyed in Kenya:

- **Over three-quarters** (77.5%) had experienced sexual harassment in the newsroom;
- **40%** had experienced it **5** times or more;
- Of those who had experienced it, **88%** did not report it to their employer; and
- The **12%** who *did* report it said their employer took no action.

This harassment has serious consequences, not only for the specific women targeted (although the detrimental impacts for individuals – psychological, physical, financial – are very well established) but also for women and girls in Kenya more broadly.

‘Many female journalists have left the industry prematurely due to sexual harassment.’

– [Judie Kaberia](#)

Executive Director, Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK)

Impacts of the exodus Judie describes range from fewer women journalists in the future (because without female role models, girls are less likely to see journalism as a potential career) to women lacking the information they need (because male journalists are less likely to report on issues that predominantly affect women – including sexual harassment).

Building on its members’ earlier work in this area,² the PROTECT coalition worked together to design holistic solutions to workplace sexual harassment, with the aims of enabling women journalists to be safe, to work without fear, and to enjoy their constitutional right to equal participation in society.

² In 2019, joint [research](#) by PROTECT partners ARTICLE 19 and AMWIK found that, of 61 women journalists in Kenya, three-quarters (75%) had experienced online harassment.

What did we do?



*ARTICLE 19
Eastern Africa
and AMWIK.*

*(Photo:
ARTICLE 19
Eastern Africa)*

A multisectoral approach to sexual harassment

PROTECT facilitated a Kenya Media Sector Working Group³ forum to discuss workplace sexual harassment against women journalists. The resultant agreement, the **Maanzoni Declaration**, was a 12-point, multisectoral approach to tackling sexual harassment within Kenya’s media sector.

The Working Group also established a Gender Committee to explore how to address sexual harassment in the media. Led by the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), the mandate of the Committee was to promote a gender-inclusive culture in newsrooms. The Committee started out in Nairobi but, with PROTECT’s support, expanded its work to other regions across Kenya.

Model sexual harassment policy for media houses

The Gender Committee developed a model sexual harassment policy for media houses, which each individual house could adapt and customise to its specific needs. The model policy covered what sexual harassment is and how to address it, including by setting up effective internal and external complaints mechanisms and allowing anonymous reporting.

³ A coalition of Kenya’s major media players, including AMWIK, ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa, Digital Broadcasters Association, Internews, Kenya Community Media Network, Kenya Editors’ Guild, Kenya Union of Journalists, and Media Council of Kenya.

AMWIK also trained media houses on how to implement the policy effectively, ensuring it delivered real change for women journalists.

Online reporting tool to monitor sexual harassment

The Gender Committee also developed an online tool to monitor cases of sexual harassment in media houses. AMWIK shares this tool with journalists who experience such harassment to gather more information about their case and improve the evidence base to shape policy and practice. Furthermore, journalists can use the tool themselves to report harassment against them – anonymously, if preferred.

Recruiting and training male ambassadors

In an earlier project, AMWIK had identified, recruited, and trained male ambassadors to speak out against sexual harassment in the media in 4 regions of Kenya. However, at the project's close, ambassadors had only been trained in 3 of these 4 regions. PROTECT therefore stepped in to work with AMWIK to recruit and train new ambassadors in the fourth and final region.

What impact did we make?

Stronger together: Uniting Kenya's media sector

Bringing together so many diverse partners in a multisectoral coalition to agree and adopt the Maanzoni Declaration and set up the Gender Committee were huge achievements for PROTECT, and show that **we are stronger together**.

Adoption of the model sexual harassment policy

So far, **5 media houses in Kenya have adopted the model sexual harassment policy.**

This means that any journalist employed by these media houses who experiences workplace sexual harassment will now benefit from a clear, comprehensive, expertly crafted policy, with clear lines of responsibility and mechanisms for reporting.

Evidence shows that such policies are vital to increase victims' confidence in reporting harassment, improve managers' responses to it, and enhance women's safety at work.

Our sexual harassment policy will benefit any journalist employed by these media houses who experiences workplace sexual harassment.

‘Most women who have been harassed, sexually or otherwise, in their workplaces don’t speak out or preserve evidence for fear of losing their jobs.’

– Lilian Museka
Programmes Officer, AMWIK

Supporting journalists to report workplace harassment

At the time of writing (March 2023), **4 journalists have reported sexual harassment at work using the Gender Committee’s online reporting tool** since March 2022.

Reporting harassment is important for victims (to ensure they can safely and equally participate in the workplace and seek justice, if they wish to) and for gender equality more broadly (as accurate information about harassment is vital to creating evidence-based policy and practice that works for women).

Prevention is better than cure

PROTECT is committed to sustainable, holistic, mutually reinforcing solutions that create lasting change. That is why our work on sexual harassment did not end with short-term support for victims or medium-term policy development for media houses (important though both of those are) but also extended to working with male ambassadors – a crucial component of the longer-term project to prevent sexual harassment from happening in the first place.

‘There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.’

– Desmond Tutu

Conclusion

Workplace sexual harassment does not happen in a vacuum; it exists on a continuum with other forms of violence against women, and is enabled by restrictive gender norms that dictate what women can and cannot do, be, and say. In the case of journalists, it prevents women's voices and concerns from being equally represented in the media. And in the case of Kenya, it denies women their constitutional right to equal participation in society.

PROTECT has contributed to a holistic, multisectoral, sustainable approach to this issue. Our results to date are impressive – from individual support to behaviour change to institutional policy – **but we know we could do so much more.**

We now wish to build on our accomplishments and strengthen the excellent relationships we have forged with our partners to catalyse further change.

'I am delighted that we are making progress and there are outlets where journalists can now report sexual harassment.'

– Judie Kaberia
Executive Director, AMWIK

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