



BEYOND COMMITMENTS

# ADVANCING POLICIES FOR GENDER-SAFE MEDIA



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# ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

- AWiM – African Women in Media
- AU – African Union
- GIZ- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation)
- MDIF- Media Development Investment Fund
- UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- AMWIK- Association of Media Women in Kenya
- GMDF- Global Media Defense Fund
- AU- CEVAGW – African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls
- GBV – Gender-Based Violence
- TFGBV- Technology-facilitated gender-based violence
- VAWG- Violence against Women and Girls.
- AU-ICD- African Union Information and Communication Directorate
- AU-WGYD – African Union Women, Gender and Youth Directorate
- FoE – Freedom of Expression
- FGM- Female Genital Mutilation
- AI- Artificial Intelligence
- NGO- Non- Governmental Organization
- SOLJA- Somaliland Journalists Association
- APHRC – African Population and Health Research Center
- SABC- South African Broadcasting Corporation



The African Women in Media (AWiM) 2025 Conference, held in Addis Ababa and co-hosted with the African Union Information & Communication Directorate (AU-ICD) and African Union Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (AU-WGYD), centered its agenda on transitioning from political commitment to actionable policy enforcement for gender safety in media. The conference theme, Beyond Commitments: Advancing Gender Policies for Gender-Safe Media, was established with a clear, dual mandate for the AWiM community.

A primary focus was galvanizing action around the AU Convention to End Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAGW). This convention was highlighted as the first continental, legally binding treaty dedicated solely to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. The Convention is crucial for women in media, as it addresses issues like workplace violence, intersecting vulnerabilities, and digital/online violence.

However, the conference underscored a critical challenge: while the Convention was adopted by the AU Heads of State in February 2025, only seven African countries had signed it (Angola, Burundi, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, The Gambia, and Ghana), and none had ratified it. Since 15 ratifications are required for the Convention to become

an enforceable legal obligation, the AWiM community was explicitly called upon to leverage their media platforms and collective voice to demand that their national leaders take ownership and ratify AU-CEVAGW.

The second key mandate was the strategic coupling of the AU-CEVAGW with the Kigali Declaration. The Kigali Declaration, co-designed and adopted at AWiM23, provides the practical steps and minimum standards for eliminating gender violence in and through media in Africa.

The conference established a unified pathway: the AU-CEVAGW provides the continental authority, and the Kigali Declaration provides the practical steps for transforming newsrooms and media narratives. Attendees were charged with defining their individual and organizational roles in advancing the AU-CEVAGW through the standards set by the Kigali Declaration, emphasizing that this work is a collective effort requiring solidarity across all sectors—media, academia, civil society, and creative industries.

*Dr Yemisi Akinbobola*  
CEO & Co-Founder, African Women in Media





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AFRICAN UNION (AU)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has emerged as a pervasive crisis that extends beyond physical spaces into the digital realm. Online platforms, originally designed to foster growth and connection, have increasingly become environments of abuse. Digital violence is recognized as real violence, demanding equal seriousness and intervention as its physical counterpart.

Governments bear a critical responsibility to ensure that protections in digital spaces are as robust as those in physical ones. Legislation alone is insufficient without effective enforcement, and member states of the African Union are urged to criminalize GBV in both online and offline contexts. Strong legal frameworks, backed by decisive action, are essential to safeguarding vulnerable populations.

The technology sector also plays a pivotal role. As gatekeepers of digital platforms, companies often operate within cultures that underrepresent women, resulting in blind spots in addressing GBV. While artificial intelligence has advanced rapidly in areas such as coding, art, and personalized recommendations, it remains inadequate in detecting and preventing online abuse. Significant investments continue to flow into innovation, while comparatively little is directed toward content moderation and user safety. Safety must be treated

as a fundamental right, not as a premium feature. Addressing GBV requires collective responsibility. Civil society must continue to advocate for change, the technology sector must embed safety into platform design, and governments must enforce laws consistently. Above all, society must refuse to remain passive bystanders in the face of violence. Only through coordinated action across all sectors can inclusive, secure, and equitable digital and physical environments be achieved.

*Leslie Richer*

AU Information & Communication Directorate

# OPENING CEREMONY AND WELCOME ADDRESS

**Speaker: Wynne Musabayana, African Union- Information and Communication Directorate.**

Wynne Musabayana warmly welcomed all participants, distinguished guests, and delegates. She emphasized:

- The importance of convening leaders from diverse sectors to advance gender-safe media in Africa.
- Recognition of the collaboration among AWiM, the African Union (including the AU Gender Charter and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child), and development partners supporting The African Union's AWiM conference: The Africa we want.
- Celebration of the diversity of delegates present, coming from across the continent and beyond.

She then facilitated a brief interactive session where attendees from different sectors identified themselves through applause, cheering, or gestures. Groups recognized included:

- Technology experts
- Media professionals
- Policy makers and regulatory bodies
- Academics and researchers
- Civil society organizations
- Participants from the Communication Workshop held in previous days
- Advocates and contributors toward the empowerment of women in media (all attendees)

**Welcome Address and Remarks by Dr. Yemisi Akinbobola, Co-Founder & CEO, African Women in Media (AWiM)**

Dr. Yemisi welcomed all guests including:

- Leslie Richer (Director, AU Information & Communication

Directorate)

- Ms. Meseret Kebede (Director, Ethiopian Media Women Association)
- Mr. David Gudisch (Deputy Permanent Observer to the AU / Embassy of Germany)
- Mr. Yonatan Tesfaye (Deputy Director, Ethiopia Media Authority)
- H.E. Ourveena Geereesha Topsy Sonoo
- Panelists, partners, stakeholders, and all delegates

## Reflections & Context

- The speaker recalled her first visit to the AU headquarters in 2019, where she introduced AWiM to AU's Information and Communication Directorate. That trip marked a turning point in her understanding of the African Union's role and its vision under Agenda 2063.
- Since then, Addis Ababa has become a regular stop, with visits at least once or twice a year. Notably, in August 2024, she presented research on barriers faced by women journalists in Ethiopia, commissioned by Fojo Media Institute and the Ethiopian Media Women Association.
- She highlighted the honour of returning six years later to co-host AWiM25 alongside AU's Information and Communication Directorate and the Women, Gender & Youth Directorate.
- Acknowledged the support of partners including Ethiopian Airlines, GIZ, Luminate, MacArthur Foundation, Fojo Media Institute, UNESCO, MDIF, WSCIJ, GMFD, Wits Journalism, and media partners such as Fana Broadcasting, Capital Newspaper, Wazema Radio, The Reporter, Ahmara Media Corporate, Association of Media Women in Kenya, and YNaija.



THEME INTRODUCTION

**Theme:** *Beyond Commitments: Advancing Gender Policies for Gender-Safe Media*

- The theme was inspired by expert consultations in 2024 on the African Union Convention to End Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG).
- Key articles highlighted:
  - **Article 7:** Recognition of intersecting vulnerabilities (disability, displacement, age, health) and accountability for perpetrators.
  - **Articles 8 & 9:** Prohibition of workplace violence and harmful labour practices affecting girls.
  - **Article 10:** Obligation for states to prevent, investigate, and prosecute femicide and gender-based killings.
  - **Article 12:** Guarantees fair judicial procedures, fast-track mechanisms, victim and witness protection, restitution, and rehabilitation.
- The Convention also addresses digital and online violence, a critical issue for women in media.

Current Status of AU-CEVAWG

- Adopted in February 2025 by AU Heads of State.
- **Seven countries signed:** Angola, Burundi, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, The Gambia, and Ghana.
- **Zero ratifications to date.**
- Requires **15 ratifications** to enter into force as a legally binding treaty.
- Without ratification, the Convention remains symbolic and unenforceable.

Call to Action

- The AWiM community was urged to:
  - Raise awareness and demystify the Convention.
  - Call on Presidents and leaders to take ownership of an issue affecting half of their population.
  - Counter global reversals in women's rights progress.
- Delegates were encouraged to:
  - Advocate for ratification if their country has signed.
  - Push for signing if their country has not yet joined.
- Central guiding question: "What is my role – and my organisation's role – in advancing AU-CEVAWG through the standards of the Kigali Declaration?"
- Emphasis that responsibility lies with all sectors – gov-

ernments, institutions, civil society, academia, creative industries, and individuals.

Link to Kigali Declaration

- Recalled AWiM23 in Kigali (2023), where 250 participants co-created the Kigali Declaration on eliminating gender violence in and through media.
- The Declaration captures the lived experiences of women in media: harassment, intimidation, unsafe newsrooms, online abuse, and harmful narratives.
- Provides minimum standards for addressing these barriers.
- Together with AU-CEVAWG, it creates a **dual framework**:
  - **Continental authority** (Convention).
  - **Practical steps** (Kigali Declaration).

Launch of AWiM2030 Vision

Three thematic pillars introduced:

1. Networking & Movement Building
  - Transforming AWiM into a global forum with year-round engagement.
  - Establishing Communities of Practice, working groups, and knowledge-sharing platforms.
2. Advocacy & Insights
  - Policy engagement at three levels:
    - **Macro:** Intergovernmental, regional, and national policymaking.
    - **Meso:** Media leaders, organisations, regulators, and institutions.
    - **Micro:** Individual women in media and grassroots communities.
3. Economic Empowerment
  - Addressing underrepresentation of women in media ownership.
  - Relaunching the pitch zone and mediapreneurship programme.
  - Supporting women-led and women-owned media initiatives with access to investment and grants.

Guiding Framework: The 3 Fs

- **Foresee:** Anticipate challenges and opportunities.
- **Foster:** Build networks and partnerships.
- **Future-Proof:** Ensure sustainability and resilience of the ecosystem.

Closing Reflections

- Delegates asked to hold two guiding questions:
  1. What is my role in advancing AU-CEVAWG through the Kigali Declaration?
  2. What can we build together across borders, sectors, and generations to make African media safer and fairer for women?
- The speech closed with gratitude to partners, participants, and the AWiM community.
- Emphasised solidarity, collective ownership, and the power of African women's voices.
- Welcomed participants to Addis Ababa and AWiM25, encouraging them to make the most of the two days

Welcome addresss and highlights by Ms. Meseret Kebede, Director, Ethiopian Media Women Association (EMWA)

Ms. Meseret welcomed delegates to Ethiopia and highlighted:

- Ethiopia's progress toward building a gender-safe media environment.
- That policy alone is insufficient without implementation.
- Studies show African women face diverse but shared challenges.
- VAW prevalence demands concrete action from all stakeholders.
- Media, policymakers, academics, technologists, and civil society must collaborate.
- Gender equality is not a luxury but a matter of dignity, justice, and urgency.
- Encouraged experience-sharing, networking, and renewed commitment to ethical and inclusive media

Remarks by Mr. David Gudisch, Deputy Permanent Observer of Germany to the AU / GIZ Representative

Key messages:

- Commended AWiM and the AU for convening hundreds of delegates.
- Emphasized the urgency of building a gender-safe media ecosystem.
- Germany strongly supports:
  - Media development
  - Protection of women journalists
  - Digital rights
  - Safe workplaces
- Highlighted worsening threats: harassment, online abuse, job insecurity, and underrepresentation.

- Noted Germany's support through Deutsche Welle projects in Uganda and Tanzania.
- Reaffirmed commitment to working with AWiM to strengthen media freedom, accountability, and gender safety.

Remarks by Ms. Leslie Richer, Director, AU Information & Communication Directorate (AUC)

Ms. Leslie delivered a powerful keynote centered on:

The crisis of GBV in digital and physical spaces

- GBV is a "pandemic" that has metastasized into digital realms.
- Digital spaces—meant for growth—have become environments of abuse.
- Digital violence is **real violence** and must be treated as such.

Government Responsibility

- Governments must act decisively; online protection should be equal to physical protection.
- Legislation without enforcement is ineffective.
- AU member states must criminalize online and offline GBV.

Technology Sector Responsibility

- Tech companies are gatekeepers but often operate with a "tech-bro monoculture" that underrepresents women.
- AI can do miracles (coding, art, recommendations) but still cannot detect GBV effectively.
- Billions are invested in new technology while little is invested in content moderation and user safety.
- Safety must not be a premium feature.

Collective Responsibility

- Civil society must advocate.
- Tech sector must embed safety.
- Governments must enforce.
- All of society must refuse to be bystanders.

Leslie officially opened the event.





KEYNOTE PANEL:

# STRENGTHENING MEDIA & REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS FOR GENDER EQUALITY & YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

**Moderators:** Lindiwe Mugabe, Gender Specialist, AU-Women, Gender and Youth Directorate  
**Speakers:** Dr Yemisi Akinbobola, African Women in Media | Yonatan Tesfaye, Ethiopian Media Authority | Latifa Tayah, High Authority for Audiovisual Communication- Morocco | David Omwoyo, Media Council of Kenya | Lebogang Maphada, Senior Investment Officer, MDIF

**PANELISTS:**

**Policy & Regulatory Levers for Gender Equality**

- **Systemic Transformation:** Latifa Tayah emphasized that no single policy can instantly change media culture; long-term systemic transformation is required. Women's presence in professional spaces is critical to influence narratives and decision-making.
- **Action-Oriented Policies:** Yonatan Tesfaye highlighted Ethiopia's focus on harassment, GBV, and conflict-sensitive reporting. Policies must be backed by enforcement, with disciplinary warnings issued to media houses for violations.
- **Safety & Continental Frameworks:** Dr. Yemisi

Akinbobola stressed that safety must be non-negotiable, guided by frameworks such as the Kigali Declaration.

- **Representation & Accountability:** David Omwoyo pointed to Kenya's 2/3 gender rule as a lever for representation. Mandatory disclosure of gender, youth, and disability data ensures accountability and transparency.
- **Incentives & Capital Access:** Lebogang Maphada outlined three pillars for shifting equity: incentives, data, and access to capital. Investment is tied to gender equity, rewarding women-led ownership with better funding prospects. The Kigali Declaration Dashboard helps address Africa's gender data gap.

**Implementation, Regulation & Compliance**

- **Pedagogical Regulation & Monitoring:** Morocco applies pedagogical approaches to explain why harmful content is unacceptable. Studies of 750+ advertising spots revealed pervasive stereotypes, reinforcing the need for strong monitoring and accountability.
- **Partnerships & Accessibility:** Ethiopia collaborates with CSOs, UN Women, and EMWA to promote gender-sensitive reporting. Guidelines are translated into Afan Oromo, capacity-building programs are delivered nationwide, and hotline 9091 enables public complaints. Monitoring reveals compliance gaps that require continuous oversight.
- **Funding & Enforcement Mechanisms:** Kenya mandates that public fund recipients allocate percentages to women, youth, and local content. Non-compliance triggers penalties, audits, and procurement rules. A "naming and shaming" approach publicly enforces accountability.
- **Investment Readiness:** MDIF incentivizes women-led entities through ESG assessments, shifting from capacity building to investment readiness to ensure women-led media are fundable.
- **Holistic Ecosystem:** Dr. Yemisi Akinbobola emphasized that an enabling ecosystem requires strong regulation, adequate funding, and compliance at both organizational and human levels. Capacity building must extend beyond senior leaders to include all staff.

**Harmonized Insights**

- **Policy levers and compliance mechanisms are inseparable.** Quotas, incentives, and safety frame-

works only succeed when backed by monitoring, enforcement, and investment readiness.

- **Data is the backbone of accountability.** Both policy design and compliance depend on reliable gender-disaggregated data, which remains scarce in Africa.
- **Incentives drive transformation.** Linking funding and investment opportunities to gender equity ensures that women-led media organizations thrive.
- **Capacity building must be holistic.** Regulations and policies are effective only when organizations and individuals are trained, supported, and held accountable.
- **Public accountability mechanisms matter.** From disciplinary warnings to audits and naming-and-shaming, enforcement ensures that gender equality commitments translate into practice.

**Conclusion**

The panel underscored that gender equality in media requires both visionary policy levers and rigorous compliance frameworks. Systemic transformation, data-driven accountability, and investment in women-led media are essential to building an enabling ecosystem. By harmonizing incentives, regulation, and enforcement, African media can advance gender equality and youth empowerment in sustainable and measurable ways.





**PANEL  
DISCUSSIONS**





MDIF WORKSHOP ON:

# MEDIA INNOVATION AND BUSINESS RESILIENCE IN AFRICA

**Moderators:** Dara Ajala, Media Development Investment Fund and Khumo Sello  
**Speakers:** Slindile Khanyile | Eleanor Wilhelm | Mamesi Lamoan | Asha Mwilu| Beza Dawit

**Session Overview**

*The panel focused on strengthening African media organizations particularly women-led outlets through financial resilience, organizational development, and investment readiness.*

**KEY THEMES**

**MDIF’s Support Programs**

- **Amplify Programs** – Cohort-based initiatives to strengthen media organizations.
- **Incubator & Capacity-Building Programs** – Tailored interventions across multiple African regions.
- Focus on **editorial independence and financial sustainability** as inseparable goals.

**The Investment Readiness Scorecard**

A tool developed to assess business maturity and guide organizational growth. It evaluates five dimensions:

- **Team & Leadership** – Performance, expertise, strategic execution, and talent retention.
- **Market Opportunity** – Market size, business model, customer acquisition, and go-to-market strategy.

- **Products** – Strength of product thinking, innovation, and alignment with audience needs.
- **Financial Model** – Revenue diversity, pricing, forecasting, and risk management.
- **Governance** – Structures that support accountability and sustainability.

Purpose: highlight strengths, identify areas needing intervention, and sequence support for long-term viability.

**Product Thinking**

- Media outputs (magazines, podcasts, TV, etc.) should be treated as products with defined users and measurable outcomes.
- Shift from intuition-driven to **data-driven approaches**.
- Apply “jobs-to-be-done” frameworks to meet audience needs.
- Product thinking creates **predictable value**, which at-

tracts paying customers and strengthens resilience.

**Financial Models**

- Revenue diversity is critical for resilience.
- Organizations must track performance, identify profitable vs. non-profitable initiatives, and forecast risks.
- Strong financial models enable confident decision-making and protect against shocks.

**Team & Leadership**

- Journalism is also a **business enterprise**.
- Key factors: industry expertise, strategic execution, and talent retention.
- Startups often struggle with retaining skilled staff, but this is essential for sustainability.

**Market & Audience Engagement**

- Grant dependency is risky due to shifting donor priorities; **self-generated revenue** is more sustainable.
- Audience dashboards track growth and identify problems.
- Media organizations must deliver promised content consistently and explore charging for content.
- Paying customers are a marker of value creation and sustainability.

**Conclusion**

The panel reinforced that financial resilience and editorial independence are inseparable. African media organizations must:

- Diversify products and revenue streams.
- Strengthen leadership and team capacity.
- Understand and grow their audiences.
- Build financial models that reduce dependency on grants.

Resilience takes different forms—from slowing down to diversifying revenue—but ultimately requires clarity of purpose, strong internal systems, and innovative business models

**Q&A SESSION ON MEDIA RESILIENCE, INNOVATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**Core Discussion Points**

**Audience as the Core Product**

- Advertisers are not buying content; they are buying audiences.
- Media organizations must recognize that their audience is the product they sell.
- Example: Investigative platforms in Nigeria lost advertising temporarily after publishing critical stories, but advertisers eventually returned because of the audience reach.
- Diversifying revenue means not only selling audiences to advertisers but also selling directly to audiences (e.g., donations, subscriptions, community support).

**Innovation in Media Business Models**

- Traditional advertising models are failing due to:
  - Companies advertising directly on social media.
  - Shifting funding landscapes.
  - New competitors entering the space.
- Innovation does not always mean inventing something new; it can mean **experimentation and adaptation** of existing models.
- Examples of innovation:
  - Sponsored content.
  - Events and community-building.





#### Audience Questions & Concerns

- **Investigative Journalism:**
  - Seen as the future of media, but funding remains a challenge.
  - Investigative stories require time and resources, which governments and donors may not reliably provide.
- **Women-Owned Media:**
  - Many small, women-led outlets struggle to compete with large stations due to procurement rules and coverage requirements.
  - Need targeted financial support and capacity-building to grow.
- **Ethics vs. Business:**
  - Panelists reframed this as “ethics and business”.
  - Media is a business, but ethical frameworks must remain integral to operations.
- **Talent Retention:**
  - Journalists are leaving traditional media for social media platforms where they can earn more.

- Mechanisms are needed to retain skilled professionals in the sector.

#### Key Takeaways

- **Audience is the most valuable asset** for media organizations.
- **Revenue diversification** is essential: advertising, subscriptions, donations, events, and sponsored content.
- **Innovation = experimentation**; old models can be adapted, not discarded.
- **Resilience requires flexibility**: slowing down, diversifying, and engaging communities.
- **Support for women-led media and funding for investigative journalism** are critical gaps.
- Ethics must remain central, even as media adapts to new business realities.

- Leveraging influencers and musicians.
- Smaller, agile newsrooms may have an advantage over legacy media because they can adapt faster and avoid bureaucratic inertia.

#### Challenges for Legacy Media

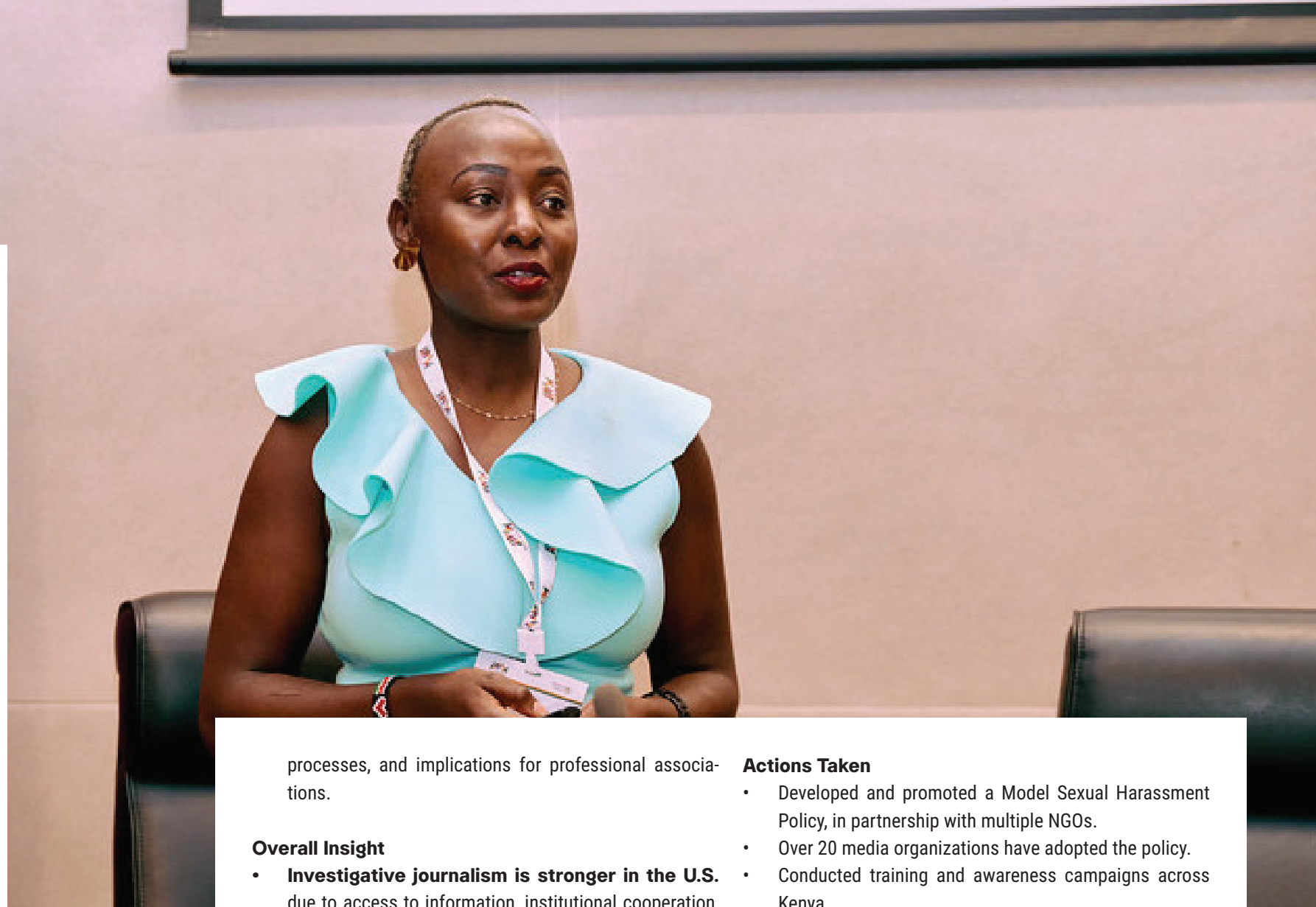
- Legacy media houses (e.g., Standard Group in Kenya) are struggling financially, with unpaid salaries and shrinking readership.
- They failed to adapt quickly to audience needs and digital competition.
- Younger audiences prefer international platforms that provide better value and credibility.
- Innovation for legacy media may mean returning to fundamentals: credible storytelling, consistency, and community engagement.

#### Resilience Strategies Shared by Panelists

- Slowing down publication to avoid burnout and allow time for training apprentices.
- Citizen journalism – engaging local associations and communities to contribute content.
- Diversification – expanding into pamphlet design, distribution, and digital platforms to supplement revenue.
- Succession planning – delegating responsibilities and building systems to reduce dependence on founders.







# POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORKS FOR ADDRESSING ONLINE AND OFFLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**Moderators:** Dr Zelalem Mengitsu, CEO | Director of Global Cybersecurity & Emerging Tech Advisory  
**Speakers:** Ifeyinwa Awagu, Pan-Atlantic University | Queenter Mbori, Association of Media Women in Kenya | Kim Thiye, Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change.

## Overview

This panel discussion explored how media, policy, and digital technology intersect in the fight against gender-based violence (GBV). Three presenters provided perspectives from Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, focusing on:

- Media accountability in reporting GBV
- Addressing sexual harassment within the media industry
- Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and digital misogyny

## PRESENTATION SUMMARIES

### Media Accountability in Reporting Domestic Violence

#### Key Points

- Many countries (including Nigeria) have policies and legal frameworks addressing violence against women, but implementation is weak.
- Journalists play a crucial role in:
  - Raising awareness
  - Shaping social norms
  - Demanding accountability
  - Making policies visible to the public

## FINDINGS FROM NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

#### Nigeria:

- Domestic violence largely reported as “straight news” with minimal depth.
- Little to **no reference to national policies**, such as the Violence Against Persons Act (VAPP, 2015).
- Reports mainly cite **criminal or penal codes**.
- Journalists rely mostly on police or eyewitness accounts; minimal investigative reporting.

#### United States:

- Even straight news stories often cite **specific policy sections**, legal codes, and court documents.
- Journalists interview judges, lawyers, and professional bodies.
- Reports integrate **community accountability**, court

processes, and implications for professional associations.

#### Overall Insight

- **Investigative journalism is stronger in the U.S.** due to access to information, institutional cooperation, and editorial norms.
- **Weak institutional collaboration** in Nigeria limits comprehensive reporting and public awareness.
- Recommendation: Build **better reporting guidelines**, enhance training for journalists, and encourage institutional collaboration.

### ADDRESSING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY (KENYA CASE STUDY)

#### TOPIC: MOVING FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE.

#### Background

- Kenya has more than 15,000 media practitioners, 300+ radio stations, 300+ TV stations, and a coordinated media sector.
- A 2021 global survey (Women in News) found Kenya had 56% prevalence of sexual harassment in media workplaces—highest in Africa.

#### Actions Taken

- Developed and promoted a Model Sexual Harassment Policy, in partnership with multiple NGOs.
- Over 20 media organizations have adopted the policy.
- Conducted training and awareness campaigns across Kenya.
- Created a documentary featuring survivor testimonies.
- Engaged male allies to address perpetration.
- Running consultations to develop a national gender media policy.

#### Findings from 2023 Research

- Prevalence increased to 60%.
- Interns are the most vulnerable group.
- Nearly 70% of journalists are unaware of workplace policies.
- Fear of retaliation prevents reporting.
- Half of male respondents blamed women for “inappropriate behavior.”
- Newsrooms still lack adequate mental health and psychosocial support.

#### Challenges

- Limited resources
- Cultural norms and patriarchal structures
- Under-reporting and mishandling of cases
- Lack of consistent accountability mechanisms



**DIGITAL MISOGYNY & ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA BY KIM THIBE**

**FOCUS:** TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GBV AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

**KEY INSIGHTS**

**Revenge Porn**

- Common behaviors: trivialization (“it’s nothing”), wide-spread sharing, victim-blaming.
- People misunderstand existing laws or ignore them.

**Cyberbullying**

- Normalized as part of being online.
- Justified as “public nature” of social media.
- Lack of adequate support routes for victims.

**Trolling & Body Shaming**

- Body shaming is highly prevalent.
- Excused as “jokes” or because “Twitter/X is not a real place.”
- Minimal platform-level support for victims.

**Child Predation Online**

- High-volume conversations around child sexual abuse.
- Major issues:
  - Underage exploitation
  - Teenage pregnancies
  - Gaps in sex-offender registry enforcement

**Recommendations**

- Stronger proactive detection technology on platforms.
- Blanket ban on explicit child content.
- Better cross-platform collaboration.
- Localization of content moderation (vernacular languages, slang).
- Demonetizing and removing harmful accounts.

**Key Cross-Cutting Themes**

- The critical role of media
- Reporting practices determine:
- Public awareness
- Policy visibility
- Cultural norms around GBV
- Levels of accountability

**Weak accountability mechanisms**

Across countries, GBV persists because:

- Laws exist but are not enforced
- Reporting remains superficial
- Survivors fear stigma or retaliation
- Tech platforms react too slowly

**Need for cultural and institutional change**

Panelists stressed the importance of:

- Shifting patriarchal norms
- Engaging men (as perpetrators, allies, leaders)
- Strengthening newsroom culture
- Enhancing media literacy and ethical training

**Data gaps persist**

Africa lacks:

- GBV reporting statistics
- Research on TFGBV
- Gender-segregated newsroom data

**Technology vs Law Gap**

Technology evolves rapidly; policies lag behind. Platforms often inadequately moderate African content

**AUDIENCE QUESTIONS & KEY RESPONSES**

**Question: Why compare Nigeria with the U.S. only?**

Answer: Chosen due to population size and availability of data; also because both have well-documented policies on domestic violence.

**Question: How do Kenyan organizations access AMWIK support?**

Answer: Through:

- **Direct outreach** – Engaging individuals or organizations personally to encourage participation and involvement.
- **General open calls** – Broad invitations shared publicly to attract diverse applicants and stakeholders.
- **Requests during field visits** – Identifying and inviting participants directly while conducting on-site activities.
- **Training program referrals** – Recruiting through recommendations from ongoing workshops or capacity-building initiatives



**Question: How do we overcome resistance to regulating the “free” internet?**

Answer:

- Apply existing hate speech frameworks online.
- Promote media advocacy and public framing.
- Encourage legal action through persistent awareness and pressure.

**Conclusion**

Across all three presentations, the overarching message is clear:

**Gender-based violence—offline or online—cannot be addressed without strong accountability frameworks.**

These frameworks depend on:

- **Trained, ethical media** – Journalists and media professionals must be equipped with skills, ethical standards, and gender-sensitive approaches to ensure reporting does not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or normalize violence.
- **Adequate policies and enforcement** – Strong legal and institutional frameworks are needed, but they must also be enforced consistently to protect women in media and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Collaboration across institutions** – Governments,

civil society, academia, media houses, and regional bodies must work together to align efforts, share resources, and reinforce accountability mechanisms.

- **Digital platform responsibility** – Social media and tech companies must take responsibility for preventing online harassment, moderating harmful content, and creating safer digital spaces for women journalists.
- **Cultural transformation** – Beyond laws and policies, societies must challenge and change harmful norms, attitudes, and narratives that normalize violence against women and girls.
- **Adequate resourcing** – Sustainable funding, investment, and infrastructure are essential to support advocacy, training, monitoring, and empowerment initiatives across the continent.
- **Continuous data collection** – Ongoing research and evidence gathering are critical to track progress, identify emerging challenges, and inform responsive policies and interventions.

The panel emphasized that **media professionals carry a collective responsibility** to protect women and marginalized communities by ensuring responsible reporting, supporting survivors, and promoting accountability in both traditional and digital spaces



# DIGITAL FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IN AFRICA

**Moderators:** Uyanda Siyotula, *SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition*

**Speakers:** Dr Phathiswa Magopeni, *Press Council of South Africa* | Lister Namumba-Rikhotso, *Media*

*Monitoring Africa* | Janet Gbam, *Article 19*

## Opening Remarks

- The Commissioner calls for **inputs on Resolution 631**, either immediately or on an SOS basis, to represent Africa's stance on public services.
- The Chairperson introduces a panel of experts:
  - **Phathiswa Magopeni** – Media and education expert with over 20 years of experience, involved in UNESCO projects.
  - **Janet Gbam** – Lawyer and tech/policy expert focusing on digital freedom.
  - **Lister Namumba** – Media rights and advocacy specialist working on Resolution 631.

## DISCUSSION THEMES

### Fragmented Media Environment

- The media landscape is highly fragmented, with audiences scattered across traditional and digital platforms.
- Online content consumption is rising, but regulation lags behind.
- Public-service media is traditionally regulated, but digital content creators are mostly unregulated.
- Democracies are increasingly affected by the unregulated flow of online information.

### Access and Inequality

- Many rural populations rely on mobile phones.
- Limited access to low-cost data and connectivity widens the gap.
- Guidelines must consider African realities, including linguistic diversity and cultural context.

### CONTENT CREATION & PLATFORM RESPONSIBILITY

#### Content Creator Dynamics

- Creators prioritize content with economic value and high engagement.
- Platforms encourage sensational or attention-winning content.
- Freedom of expression is important, but responsibility must be balanced with public interest.

#### Platform Moderation Issues

- Platforms prioritize commercial interests over public-interest content.
- AI is increasingly used to replace human moderators (Meta example), leading to:
  - Over-removal of legitimate content.
  - Under-removal of harmful material.
- Deep fake technology and AI-generated content pose serious risks to authenticity.

### Mis/Disinformation & Harmful Content

- Online spaces are highly vulnerable to:
  - Clickbait
  - Misinformation
  - Gender-based online harassment
  - Manipulated images (e.g., women's photos turned into explicit content)
- African languages and cultural contexts are often ignored in moderation systems.

### Resolutions Under Discussion

- **Resolution 680:**
  - Promotes amplification of credible content.
  - Focuses on updating guidelines using metadata.
  - Recognizes gendered harm online.
- **Resolution 681:**
  - Works alongside 680 to strengthen human rights in digital information spaces.
  - Calls for input from wider public, not just experts.

### Public Service Media (PSM) Issues

- PSM has limited reach in Africa.
- Important principles for PSM guidelines:
  - Credibility
  - Inclusivity
  - Cultural sensitivity
  - Avoidance of propaganda
  - Independence from commercial interests

- Public service content should:
  - Serve minorities and persons with disabilities.
  - Reflect African storytelling traditions.

### Monetization and Ethical Concerns

- Monetization pressures affect content quality.
- Content creators often prioritize popularity over accuracy.
- Ethical journalism councils (e.g., Belgium) show how unified regulation across TV, online, and radio can work.

### Calls for Regulation vs. Freedom

- Debate about whether stringent laws are needed.
- Emphasis on balanced accountability, not censorship.
- Need for media literacy, especially for users who spread harmful content unknowingly.

### Final Reflections & Closing

- UNESCO reaffirms its support in consultations and guideline development.
- There is a need for widespread consultation before finalizing resolutions.
- Regulations must align with human rights principles.
- Trust-building between audiences, journalists, and platforms is essential.
- The upcoming consultation for Resolution 630 invites participation from all stakeholders.





WALKING THE TALK:

# IMPLEMENTING GENDER POLICIES IN MEDIA HOUSES

Session Overview

The panel, titled “Walking the Talk: Implementing Gender Policies in Media Houses”, brought together regulators, media leaders, and women’s associations to discuss challenges and practical steps for advancing gender equality in African media organizations. The session included:

- Panel introductions (regulators, media experts, women’s associations).
- Screening of an animation illustrating the challenges faced by women journalists.
- Q&A with regulators and association leaders on policy implementation, advocacy, and practical steps.

KEY THEMES

Challenges Faced by Women Journalists

- Discrimination begins early, even at university and entry-level recruitment.
- Women are often asked inappropriate personal questions (marital status, children, future plans).
- Persistent stereotypes push women toward “soft beats” (arts, lifestyle) rather than hard news or leadership roles.
- Harassment and lack of authority remain widespread obstacles.

Role of Regulators

- Regulators engage in monitoring, research, and capacity building.
- Encouragement of media councils to self-regulate and advocate for gender-sensitive policies.
- Licensing criteria increasingly include gender, youth, and disability representation in programming.
- Current gaps: limited influence over newsroom leadership and quotas, though informal supervision and training for women leaders are being introduced.

Evidence-Based Advocacy

- Associations like the Ethiopian Media Women Association (EMWA) use roundtables and grassroots engagement to amplify women’s voices.

- Advocacy is grounded in evidence: documenting women’s underrepresentation and professional challenges.
- Regional focal points connect women practitioners with media leaders, building trust and credibility.
- The goal is not just policy creation but policy implementation.

Practical Steps for Media Houses

- Start with awareness and mindset change—addressing stereotypes in content, advertising, and newsroom culture.
- Create gender policies designed by women themselves, ensuring they reflect lived realities.
- Establish gender officers, quotas, and women-only leadership positions to accelerate representation.
- Provide training and mentorship for women journalists to strengthen leadership capacity.
- Recognize the emotional and professional burdens women carry, and ensure risk-conscious assignments.

Case Studies & Examples

- **Amhara Media Corporation:** Implemented merit-based promotions, assigning women to leadership roles.
- **Reporter Newspaper:** Adopted a gender policy created by women editors, ensuring authenticity and relevance.

vance.

- **EMWA Initiatives:** Monthly gatherings, women’s associations, and programs focused on women’s issues to build solidarity and accountability.

Key Takeaways

- Gender equality in media requires structural change and cultural transformation.
- Regulators, associations, and media houses must collaborate to:
  - Build awareness and shift mindsets.
  - Implement evidence-based policies.
  - Ensure accountability and enforcement mechanisms.
- Women journalists need not symbolic gestures but real opportunities, authority, and protection.
- Progress is possible when women’s voices are central to policy design and implementation.

Q&A SESSION ON WALKING THE TALK: IMPLEMENTING GENDER POLICIES IN MEDIA HOUSES

Core Discussion Points

Shared Challenges across Countries

- Women in media—especially Black women—face similar limitations across Africa: lack of authority, underrepresentation in leadership, and systemic discrimination.
- Participants emphasized the importance of continued dialogue and advocacy to close these gaps and push media owners toward accountability.

Representation of Women in Media

- Debate arose around portrayals of women as caregivers or domestic workers.
- Panelists clarified: it is not wrong to show women in these roles, but exclusive stereotyping limits aspirations.
- Media must diversify representation—showing women as professionals, leaders, analysts, and experts—to inspire the next generation.

Enforcement of Gender Policies

- Policies often exist but remain **poorly implemented**.
- Rwanda’s experience:
  - 40 media houses adopted gender and sexual harassment policies.
  - Only 40% implemented them effectively.
  - Only 20% promoted women into leadership roles.
- Success story: awarding and incentivizing best-performing media houses encouraged others to follow.

ing media houses encouraged others to follow.

- Call for **stronger enforcement mechanisms**, including regular monitoring, gender committees, and even punitive measures when violations occur.

Innovation and Sustainability

- Gender policies are not just about justice—they also contribute to sustainability of newsrooms.
- Active gender desks can help monetize content, attract advertisers, and build community trust.
- Universities and training institutions must prepare journalists for the realities of harassment, discrimination, and trauma in the field.
- Therapy and safe spaces were highlighted as essential for supporting women journalists who face psychological strain.

Practical Recommendations

- **Safe spaces** in newsrooms (e.g., gender desks, flexible work arrangements).
- **Regular gender audits** and weekly review teams, similar to first-aid teams.
- **Evidence-based advocacy** to convince media owners of the value of gender-sensitive policies.
- **Capacity building** for women leaders and mentorship programs.
- **Diversified representation** in content: women not only as victims but also as experts and professionals.

Reflections & Concerns

- Frustration was expressed that the same problems are discussed repeatedly at conferences without significant progress.
- A global study was cited: achieving gender equality in media may take up to 67 years at current pace.
- Participants stressed the need for radical transformation, not just incremental change, to accelerate progress.

Conclusion

The Q&A underscored that while gender policies exist in many African media houses, **implementation and enforcement remain weak**. Sustainable change requires:

- Stronger accountability mechanisms.
- Diversified representation of women in media content.
- Support systems for women journalists facing harassment and trauma.
- Collaboration between regulators, associations, and media owners.



# POLICY AND ETHICS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN SHAPING THE AFRICAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

**Moderators:** David Omwoyo, Media Council of Kenya  
**Speakers:** Martha Iyambo, MK Legal Consultancy | Mbanangwa Cynthia Kwilasya, MK Legal Consultancy | Uyavhuya Matibe, MK Legal Consultancy

### Session Overview

The chairperson facilitated a discussion on digital extraction, intellectual property (IP) challenges, and gender-safe digital practices in the AI era. The workshop included presenters from the Data Protection and Privacy Department, with a focus on gender-safe media and digital rights in Africa.

The central themes were:

- How AI affects gender, media, and digital rights
- Structural and algorithmic biases
- Platform accountability
- African innovation vs. dependence
- Regulation, capacity building, and regional frameworks

### AI-DRIVEN GENDERED RISKS

#### Amplification of Harm

AI systems were noted to amplify risks disproportionately for women, especially those in public roles. Key issues include:

- **Algorithmic amplification** of harassment and sexualized content
- Harmful narratives spreading rapidly because engagement is prioritized over accuracy
- **Moderation blind spots**, leading to insufficient protection for women
- **Opaque algorithms** reducing visibility of women journalists and creators
- **Deep fakes and AI-generated disinformation** used to intimidate, discredit, or silence women
- **Current policies fail** to protect against these harms

- Lack of **algorithmic transparency** from major platforms

#### Opportunities for African Union (AU) Leadership

The presenters highlighted major regional opportunities:

#### AU Frameworks

- Developing a Gender-Safe AI and Media Framework
- Setting continental standards for safe, inclusive AI ecosystems

#### Transparency Requirements

- Mandating algorithmic transparency reports
- Establishing data disclosure obligations for tech companies



#### Oversight & Governance

- Creating independent oversight boards and regional bodies to regulate AI, platform behavior, and media safety

#### African Innovation

- Investing in African-led bias-mitigation technologies
- Encouraging development of local datasets, tools, and research
- Closing the technology gap by reducing dependence on Western AI models

### STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Intellectual Property (IP)

- Introduce gender-responsive IP frameworks
- Require transparent control and licensing mechanisms for AI-trained data
- Strengthen regional support structures to protect African creators

#### Privacy & Data Protection

- Mandate algorithmic transparency
- Require gender-impact assessments before systems

deploy

- Strengthen privacy laws to reflect AI-specific threats

#### Platform Accountability

- Require regular transparency reporting by big tech
- Establish local and regional oversight boards to monitor algorithmic harms
- Impose penalties on platforms for repeated violations

#### Capacity Building

- Provide specialized AI training to journalists, regulators, civil society
- Equip local organizations with technical capacity
- Promote regional collaboration for shared standards and training

### AUDIENCE QUESTIONS & KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

#### African Innovation vs. African Complaints

A participant argued that Africa has spent decades complaining rather than creating digital solutions.





**Response:**

- The issue is not complacency; Africa lacks unified financing and resource pooling.
- African nations are moving cautiously due to ethical concerns and past misuse of technology.

**DEEP DIVE: ETHICAL CONCERNS WITH AI TOOLS**

**Grok (Example of AI Misuse)**

- Grok was cited for generating non-consensual sexual images (undressing women).
- It behaves differently when asked to undress men – showing gender bias.
- Big tech platforms respond slowly to complaints (sometimes 40+ days).

**Implications:**

- Vulnerable groups face disproportionate harm.
- Regulation must directly target AI misuse and non-consensual imagery.

**AFRICA’S RELATIONSHIP WITH AI AND DATA**

**Lack of African Models & Data**

- Africa lacks locally trained AI models due to cultural and historical diversity.
- Building datasets is difficult and risky (privacy, security, representation).
- Personal data used to train AI becomes a liability without proper safeguards.

**Examples of AI Bias**

- **Duolingo bias:** teaches irrelevant or stereotypical content for African languages (e.g., Zulu → lessons about rivers and washing).
- **Loan application bias:** AI reinforces structural inequality in automated decisions.
- **Doctor fraud detection example:** AI flagged **all Black doctors** as high risk because of biased training data.

**MEDIA, MISINFORMATION & AI MISUSE**

**AI and Crisis of Truth**

AI technologies like deep fakes have escalated:

- Erosion of public trust
- Weakening of critical thinking
- Spread of unverified content

A real case was referenced:

- A Malawian journalist published a false aviation scandal based solely on ChatGPT output without verification.

**Media Vulnerabilities & Opportunities**

- AI targets the media ecosystem but can also serve as a tool for fact-checking, organization, and research.
- The media must uphold integrity and combat AI-driven misinformation.

**Panel Reflections**

**Does AI Present Opportunities for African Journalism?**

**Yes**, but under two conditions:

- When used responsibly, AI can raise content quality (“move work from B to A”).
- When misused as a shortcut, it becomes dangerous

**AUDIENCE INPUTS: PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Roadmap**

- A continent-wide AI roadmap should be agreed among African countries.

**Attribution Problems**

- AI provides content without sources → high plagiarism risk.
- South Africa is developing localized media tools to ensure attribution, press codes, and editorial standards.
- Examples were given of interviews misattributed by AI, disproportionately affecting women.

**African Content & Representation**

- Lack of African content means AI pulls from Western datasets.
- Africa should provide:
  - More local photos
  - More African literature, media, archives
  - More structured metadata

This will improve how AI represents Africa.

**Regulation Questions**

- Who regulates AI?
- How strict should the regulation be?
- Should the approach mirror:
  - US (innovation-first),
  - Europe (human-rights-first),
  - China (centralized ecosystem)?

**Broader Observations on AI and Society**

**AI in Academia**

- AI-generated work often contains unverified or plagiarized content.
- The output quality mirrors the quality of inputs.

**AI in African Media**

- African media currently uses near 0% AI, unlike global media houses generating hundreds of AI-assisted stories daily.

**Stereotypes and Representation**

- AI systems built outside Africa embed foreign stereotypes.
- Africans must influence future AI development.

**Dependence vs. Independence**

- Africa does not need to build AI from scratch.
- The continent should fine-tune existing models with African datasets.

**AI Saturation in Daily Tasks**

- AI now drafts:
  - CVs
  - Job applications
  - Shortlisting
  - Interview questions
  - Legal petitions

This raises concerns about:

- Over-reliance
- Loss of originality
- Declining critical thinking

**Closing Notes**

- AI is powerful but double-edged.
- Africa must:
  - Build capacity
  - Regulate responsibly
  - Preserve cultural and linguistic identity
  - Enhance media literacy
  - Strengthen data protection laws

The session concluded with recognition that Africa is at a critical intersection: The right decisions now could determine whether AI becomes a tool of empowerment or exploitation on the continent.



# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL POLICIES AND DIGITAL RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS IN AFRICAN SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE.

**Moderators:** Yemisi 'Shafe Adefolaju, Tech4Dev

**Speakers:** Vincentia Khakasa, BioAir Uganda | Ivy Gikonyo, Centre for Human rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria | Rachel Onamusi, VN Sync | Ellison Shumba, University of Johannesburg | Portia Sizalobuhle Ndlovu, North-West University.

## Overview of the Session

This panel explored how African countries are creating laws and digital policies, how women experience digital spaces, and why implementation gaps persist. The speakers addressed:

- Tokenistic law-making processes
- Online harms affecting women
- Weak policy enforcement
- The need for feminist, inclusive, and equitable digital futures

The conversation stressed that although policies exist on paper, they often fail to protect women or include them in meaningful decision-making.

## PRESENTATION SUMMARIES

### “Law-Making as a Box-Ticking Exercise”

This research investigates how digital laws are created, who participates, and why the process often becomes symbolic rather than meaningful.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Government-Controlled Participation

- Governments invite “stakeholders” only to legitimize their process.

- If participants challenge the status quo or raise uncomfortable issues, authorities shut down the discussion or exclude them.
- In Zambia, ministries hand-pick media groups; anyone critical of government is deliberately excluded.

### Out-of-Touch Consultations

- In some cases, people who don’t even use the internet are asked to decide how digital spaces should function.

### Zambia & Zimbabwe Models

- **Zambia:** Strong civil society, but invitations depend on



whether you are “friendly” with government.

- **Zimbabwe:** Community participation is theoretically allowed, but often symbolic.

### Big Tech Submissions Ignored

- Technology companies send written policy input, but it is rarely considered.

### Use of Laws for Political Abuse

- Example: Zimbabwe’s law criminalizing “unlawful and intentional spread of false data causing psychological or economic harm.”
- Male politicians use this law to attack women—claiming criticism “caused psychological harm.”

### Central Insight

Citizens are told they are “participating,” but the process is often **performative**, and parliaments frequently fail to provide meaningful oversight.

## WOMEN, INFLUENCE, AND DIGITAL FUTURES

### Key Focus

Panelist highlighted how the lack of policy implementation exposes women to harm and limits their digital opportunities.

### Main Points

### Real Consequences of Weak Policies

- Example: A Nigerian singer’s photo was AI-manipulated and circulated—showing no one is safe (rich, poor, famous, ordinary).

### Women Shape Digital Futures

- Women must be included because they are primary users and targets of harm.
- Digital policies should reflect the needs of the people most affected.



### Access vs. Influence

- Many women can participate online, but few have influence over digital policy.
- The goal is to move from consumption to power.

### Challenges

- Frameworks exist but are not enforced.
- Women are often not present in policy rooms; therefore, important issues go unaddressed.
- Policies often ignore lived experiences.

### Localized Solutions

- Africa should not “copy-paste” Western or Chinese models.
- Policies should reflect African realities—e.g., who talks about:
  - Menopause
  - Money after divorce
  - Women’s mobility

### Digital space is not abstract

It determines economic mobility, access to information, and personal empowerment.

## REIMAGINING DIGITAL MEDIA POLICIES IN ZIMBABWE

### Background

Digital platforms have increased the visibility of women activists, but these spaces also expose them to new threats such as surveillance and harassment.

### Key Zimbabwean Policies Reviewed

- **Media Policy Framework** – promises universal access to information.
- **Data Protection Act (2021)** – meant to protect personal data and online users.

### Primary Findings

- Policies exist in principle, but enforcement is weak.
- Women are active online but face:
  - Harassment
  - Psychological harm
  - Threats
  - Exploitation
- Rights enjoyed offline are not protected online.
- High volumes of data mean many abuses go unpun-

ished.

### Recommendations

- Collective responsibility – government, civil society, tech platforms, and citizens.
- Strengthen institutions and enforcement.
- Expand protections to include women with disabilities.
- Improve digital literacy with emphasis on women’s on-line safety.
- Translate policy language into practical safeguards.

## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION VS. DIGITAL JUSTICE

### Main Argument

Africa is rapidly digitizing—but digital transformation is not digital justice.

### Key Points

- Smart cities, e-government, AI systems are emerging but assume everyone has equal access.
- Gendered inequalities persist:
  - Different levels of internet access
  - Financial exclusion
  - Device ownership controlled by partners or families
  - Lack of safety and visibility online
- Women are assumed to be digital citizens but often are not.
- Digital systems must be feminist in design.
- “Feminist” here means fair, safe, inclusive, not prioritizing women over men.

### Recommendations

- Funding and investment in feminist digital infrastructures.
- Gender-aware connectivity initiatives.
- Policies that recognize offline inequalities.

### Conclusion

We must decide now whether Africa’s digital future will be fair and inclusive or continue to reproduce existing inequalities.







# MEDIA NARRATIVES AND POLICIES THAT SHAPE ONLINE AND OFFLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MEDIA

**Moderators:** Ifeyinwa Awagu- Pan Atlantic University  
**Speakers:** Dr Vincent Obia, University of Sheffield | Mantate Queeneth Mlotshwa, The Africa Institute | Fiona Nzingo, Global Forum for Media Development | Stella Kasina, Independent Journalist

**Overview**  
This late afternoon session focused on how media narratives, institutional accountability, and cultural framing shape responses to gender-based violence (GBV), both online and offline. The discussion highlighted the challenges faced by independent journalists, the power of language in perpetuating misogyny, and the urgent need for structural support and solidarity.

**PRESENTATION SUMMARIES**

**When Silence Becomes Complicity (Independent Women Journalists)**

**Key Points:**

- Shared four stories illustrating GBV:
  - Virginia Wangari: abused for ten years by her husband, a respected church leader; speaking out was framed as “ruining his reputation.”
  - Wanza: raped by a pastor after canceling marriage; required surgery; perpetrator continues preaching

- without accountability.
- A boy: raped and deliberately infected with HIV.
- A 10-year-old girl: suffered reproductive complications due to abuse.
- Challenges for independent journalists:
  - Lack of funding, legal support, and mental health counseling.
  - Risk of lawsuits from perpetrators with financial resources.
  - Journalists often house survivors themselves due to lack of shelters

- Recommendations:**
- Establish legal aid and housing support for survivors.
  - Provide trauma counseling and psychosocial support for journalists.
  - Act urgently before post-Kigali Declaration reforms make interventions more costly.

**LANGUAGE, MORALITY, AND SOLIDARITY IN COMBATING GBV.**

- Key Points:**
- Focused on derogatory terms such as slut, whore, and prostitute (e.g., “hure” in her country).
  - Language attacks women’s bodies and normalizes misogyny.
  - Responses:
    - Moral perspective: “Would you say this to your sister?”
    - Legal perspective: Words should carry consequences, though often dismissed as “everyday language.”
  - Women are forced to build “thick skin” against verbal abuse.
  - Importance of solidarity:
    - Rejecting complicity in harmful jokes or gossip.
    - Supporting influencers who reclaim slurs (e.g., wearing a “Hure” t-shirt).
  - Emphasized that responses to abuse must be intentional and supportive.

**KEY CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**

- Media Responsibility**
- Independent journalists fill gaps left by mainstream media but lack institutional support.
  - Reporting practices determine visibility of perpetrators and survivor protection.

- Language as Violence**
- Derogatory terms perpetuate misogyny across cultures.
  - Reframing words (e.g., “Black Power”) shows potential for reclaiming language.

- Weak Accountability Mechanisms**
- Survivors face stigma, retaliation, and lack of institutional redress.
  - Journalists and survivors alike lack legal and psychosocial support.

- Solidarity & Cultural Change**
- Collective responsibility to challenge harmful narratives.
  - Advocacy needed to ensure perpetrators are named and held accountable.

- Urgency of Action**
- Without immediate interventions, reforms may be delayed or costly.
  - Policy alone cannot detect or prevent all forms of GBV; framing and advocacy are critical.

**Audience Questions & Key Responses**

On language:  
Comment: “Black was once a term of shame, now it is Black Power.” → Words can be reclaimed positively.  
Recognition that derogatory terms against women are widespread across African languages.

On accountability:  
Advocacy must identify perpetrators and demand accountability.

Framing matters: how media tells the story determines whether perpetrators are exposed or protected.

- Conclusion**
- The session underscored that GBV cannot be addressed without:
- Strong accountability frameworks.
  - Institutional support for independent journalists.
  - Legal, psychosocial, and housing resources for survivors.
  - Cultural transformation in language and solidarity.

The panel emphasized that silence and complicity perpetuate violence. Media professionals, policymakers, and communities must act collectively to protect women and marginalized groups, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable and survivors are supported.



# REPRESENTATION MATTERS! POLICIES THAT GET US CLOSER TO EQUITABLE VISIBILITY IN AFRICAN MEDIA

**Moderators:** Rachel Onamusi, *VN Sync*

**Speakers:** Wendy Papo, *Quote This Woman+* | Scheherazade Safla-Gafoor

## Overview of the Forum Presentation

*The forum features multiple speakers discussing digital literacy, representation, participatory research, and systemic inequalities.*

*The central project focuses on empowering women and youth through digital learning and storytelling.*

*Ethical research practices, algorithmic bias, media representation, and socioeconomic challenges are emphasized.*

## THE DIGITAL LEARNING PROJECT

### Project Objectives:

- Empower women through digital skills.
- Use visual media platforms for storytelling.
- Apply Participatory Action Research (PAR) with cyclical reflection and action.

### Workshop Insights:

- Participants included women and youth, some as young as 11.
- Activities involved taking photographs, storytelling, and goal-sharing.

- AI tools (Midjourney, Copilot) were used in content creation.

### Challenges Identified:

- Ethical concerns involving minors, guardianship, and sensitive disclosures.
- Participants shared experiences related to trauma and sexual violence.
- The digital divide limited participation (data costs, low confidence, lack of access).
- Algorithmic bias was visible, especially in skin-tone representation.

## Outputs & Future Plans:

- Audio files from Season 1 will be developed into a podcast.
- Aim to elevate voices of women of colour on global platforms.
- Long-term goal: expand programs in the Cape Flats (funding needed).

## MEDIA LANGUAGE, REPRESENTATION & POLICY

### Research Focus:

- Examines how language in newsrooms functions as invisible policy.
- Investigates the tension between advocacy and newsroom reporting.

### Key Points:

- GBV guidelines exist but are inconsistently applied.

- Language shapes public understanding and influences who is centred or blamed.
- Headlines can reinforce or challenge societal norms.

### Case Studies:

- #AMINEXT movement highlighted the power of naming violence.
- Protests on economic justice were reframed by media as “traffic disruption.”

### Issues Identified:

- Strong African frameworks exist (Maputo Protocol, AU Agenda) but implementation is weak.
- No clear language policy in newsrooms.

### Cost of Sanitised Language:

- Distances the public from reality.
- Reinforces social attitudes that harm survivors.





- Fails to centre affected communities.

**Ubuntu Framework:**

- “I am because you are.”
- Encourages accountability and reporting with communities.
- Aims to transform narrative culture and promote dignity.

**COLOURISM, AI BIAS & DIGITAL REPRESENTATION**

**Main Themes:**

- Colourism persists across digital spaces, social media, and AI systems.
- Dark-skinned Africans experience “double erasure.”

**Key Issues:**

- Colonial legacies contribute to light-skin privilege.
- Nigeria is a major hub for skin bleaching due to social and economic pressures.
- AI technologies often fail to recognise or accurately represent dark-skinned users.

**Algorithmic Consequences:**

- Facial recognition misreads dark skin as an error.
- Filters lighten skin and narrow facial features.
- Algorithms (e.g., TikTok) amplify visibility of light-skinned individuals.

**Solutions Proposed:**

- Nollywood can lead reforms by banning digital skin-lightening and embracing diverse skin tones.
- Governments should create policies addressing complexion-based discrimination.
- Developers must identify and mitigate melanin bias.
- Public education campaigns are required.

**AUDIENCE QUESTIONS & RESPONSES**

**Influence of Stories on Policy:**

- Stories help shape bottom-up approaches for government.
- Many grassroots projects struggle with funding and scaling.

**Language & Public Interpretation:**

- Accurate naming of violence is crucial.
- Euphemistic terms (e.g., “domestic abuse”) hide sever-

ity.

**Obstacles in Newsrooms:**

- Male-dominated spaces deprioritize women’s narratives.
- Social media becomes an outlet but lacks robust editorial structure.

**Teaching Children About Representation:**

- Reinforce beauty and confidence in dark-skinned children.
- Challenge harmful norms in media, modelling, and workplaces.
- Colourism affects self-worth and must be actively countered.

**Cross-Cutting Themes**

- Representation matters across media, AI, and digital spaces.
- Digital divide continues to shape access and empowerment.
- Language has power to shape public opinion and policy.
- Structural inequalities require systemic reform.
- Digital storytelling and participatory research can amplify unheard voices.
- Decolonized approaches and cultural sovereignty are central to justice.



SOMALILAND'S WOMEN  
JOURNALISTS IN DISASTER RISK REPORTING:

# BRIDGING GBV, GOVERNANCE, AND THE KIGALI DECLARATION

**Moderators:** Fenke Elskamp, *Free Press Unlimited*

**Speakers:** Fatima Mohamed, *Freelance Journalist* | Hadia Khadar Dahir, *SOLJA*

## PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

### Introduction

- Women from Somaliland participated in the session.
- Fatima Mohamed, a journalist from Somaliland, shared a video she produced.
- Hadia Khadar Dahir presented on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Somaliland and her experiences working in the field.

## KEY ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED

### Underrepresentation of Women in Somaliland Media

- Caused by cultural and patriarchal barriers.
- Limited access to leadership roles, mentorship, and institutional support.
- Weak gender equality and safety policies.
- GBV reporting remains low.

### GBV in Displacement Sites

- Women in displacement camps face:
  - Heightened GBV risk
  - Limited access to services
  - Increased vulnerabilities
- Support structures include state institutions, transitional authorities, and NGOs.

### SOLJA's Work

- Provides training for journalists.
- Advocates for gender-sensitive policies.
- Supports collaboration between medical institutions, NGOs, and community structures.
- Progress includes:
  - Ongoing training and capacity building.
  - Increased youth engagement.
  - Growing digital media platforms.
  - Increased visibility of women's media voices for GBV survivors.
  - Promotion of ethical storytelling that drives empathy and change.

### Call to Action

- Invest in training women journalists across the region.
- Integrate gender-responsive disaster risk management strategies.
- Strengthen collaboration between media, civil society, and relevant institutions.
- Expand grant and funding opportunities.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

### Access to Justice

**Question:** Which system offers an effective path to justice and protection — elders, police, religious leaders, or a survi-







vor-centered model?

**Video Presentation**

A documentary was shown highlighting:

- Disaster-related challenges in Somaliland linked with GBV.
- A survivor raped by eight individuals shared her journey to support and empowerment.
- Reporting levels were previously low but have recently improved.
- Rape cases were often resolved traditionally rather than through courts.
- Officials noted that collaboration among institutions has improved reporting rates.
- Many cases involve single perpetrators, except the case mentioned above.
- Survivors often disappear after reporting due to financial constraints.

**Challenges Identified**

- Survivors lack knowledge of available services (e.g., legal assistance).
- Customary practices keep cases hidden.
- Some officials suppress reports, worsening the problem.
- Economic vulnerability contributes to increased GBV.

- Bahikooob organization provides psychological and legal support.
- IDP camps provides compressive service to women affected by drought, unemployment, and GBV risks.

**REFLECTIONS FROM SPEAKERS**

**Fatima Mohamed**

- Appreciated attendees for watching the video.
- Shared that preparing the video was emotionally challenging.
- As a social worker, she had easier access to NGOs but government offices delayed sharing information.
- On respectful filming:
  - Consent is always requested.
  - Names and faces are hidden.
  - Ensuring safety is a priority.

**Hadia Khadar Dahir**

- Emphasized the need for accurate and sensitive reporting on GBV.
- Journalists must adhere to the Do No Harm principle.
- Survivors are “silenced twice”—by perpetrators and by the system.

- GBV “cannot be negotiated”; survivors deserve full legal protection.

**MODERATOR’S QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES**

**Challenges for Women Journalists**

- Fatima:
  - In her community, issues are expected to remain silent.
  - Journalists must break that silence.
  - It is risky but necessary work.

**Traditional vs. Modern Justice Systems**

- Fatima and Hadia highlighted:
  - Insufficient justice mechanisms lead to secondary trauma.
  - Lack of evidence often prevents prosecution.

**Messages of Hope**

- Fatima urged community members and traditional leaders to:
  - Stop discrimination.
  - Stop victim-blaming.
  - Create space for justice and survivor dignity.

**QUESTIONS FROM ATTENDEES**

**Emotional Impact on Journalists**

**Question:** How did covering such difficult stories affect you emotionally?

- **Fatima:**
  - It was emotional, but her social work background and preparation helped.
  - Support from colleagues made it bearable.
- **Hadia:**
  - She cried after discussing the case with Fatima.
  - Despite the emotional weight, they are proud to contribute to change.

**Comments from Participants**

- **Selamawit (Ethiopian Women in Media):**
  - GBV work requires practical experience; Fatima’s social work background strengthened her reporting.
  - Suggested sharing these experiences with other women in media.
- **Fatima:**
  - Her background in GBV and child protection case management was useful in producing the documentary.
- **Hadia:**
  - Proposed virtual collaboration with Ethiopian Women in Media for mutual learning.

**Closing Remarks**

- Moderator Fenke Elskamp emphasized:
  - The courage and significance of the speakers’ work.
  - This type of dialogue does not often take place in Somaliland.
- The sessions by SOLJA demonstrate how media dialogue and multi-media engagement can drive positive change.
- Fatima expressed gratitude and said she is inspired to continue her work.





DEMONSTRATION & FILM:

# "ADVENTURES TOO: A BLUEPRINT FOR CULTURALLY GROUNDED MEDIA FOR YOUTH SRHR EMPOWERMENT IN AFRICA"

**Moderators:** Malaka Grant, *Adventures From the Bedrooms of African Women* |  
Ami Tamakloe, *Cornell University*

**Introduction**

- The plenary session focused on Adventures Too, a media initiative designed to empower African youth through culturally grounded Sexual and Reproductive Health and Human Rights (SRHHR) education.
- Malaka Grant, the co-founder, opened the session by explaining the initiative’s foundation and vision.

**Presentation by Malaka Grant (Co-Founder)**

- The project began with a commitment to feminist principles and a desire to address the legacy of gender-based violence (GBV).
- They used storytelling as a tool to support women who

had experienced GBV.

- The vision behind Adventures Too is to guide young people to express themselves and provide them with accessible media platforms where their voices can be heard.

**Presentation by Ami Tamakloe (Program Manager)**

- Adventures Too originated in 2023 as a blog, created in response to the noticeable lack of information for young people about sexual assault.
- The blog initially targeted audiences 18+, and gradually evolved into a springboard for empowering young women.
- Ami emphasized that Adventures Too is “Malaka’s

- baby”—a vision shared and expanded by both presenters.
- She highlighted that:
  - Many young people rely on the internet for information about sex.
  - Sexuality is deeply influenced by culture and society.
  - Northern Ghana is particularly marginalized, and the research for this project intentionally focused there.
  - Their research was thematic and intersectional, forming questions based on different community realities.
  - The project was community-centered, shifting power away from outsiders and allowing the community to define their own experiences.
  - Key stakeholders included: students, parents, educators, and religious organizations.

**Youth Engagement and Video Presentation**

A video was shared showing teenage students discussing the topic of “crush.”

**Highlights:**

- Students defined a crush as admiring, liking, or loving someone without that person’s knowledge.
- Peer panelists asked each other what type of person they tend to have a crush on.
- Students identified behavior, physical appearance, and how a person carries themselves as key factors.
- Anna stressed that she did not instruct the students on what to say—the responses reflected the students’ own perspectives.
- It was noted that having a crush is not a problem by itself; the experiences surrounding it determine whether it becomes positive or negative.

Adventures Too has now become a platform where youth feel free to express themselves.

Malaka acknowledged and thanked Anna for her contribution to the project.

**QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

**Q1: What was the response from parents and the school community?**

**Answer:**

- The response has been positive.

- These conversations are not new in many communities, but the team ensures they consider cultural contexts and nuances.
- Special care is taken because participants are under 18.

**Q2: What value does the program add to students and families?**

**Answer:**

- There is a growing global pushback against SRHR, including in Ghana.
- Even using SRHR language has become controversial, and school curricula often fail to reach students effectively.
- The platform offers a culturally sensitive way to discuss important issues such as child pregnancy and harmful practices.
- The goal is to help girls learn healthy, accurate, and safe information.

**Q3: The addition of recorded conversations seems powerful. How does this help?**

**Answer:**

- Recorded content encourages broader participation and makes the conversations more accessible.
- Many children do not discuss these topics freely, and many parents hesitate to talk about them.
- Guidance from adults is essential; one participant even suggested that churches should support and use such resources.
- The team is engaging multiple stakeholders to strengthen these efforts.

**Conclusion**

The Adventures Too session highlighted the critical need for culturally grounded and youth-centered education in Africa. Through storytelling, community engagement, and media-driven dialogue, the initiative provides young people with a safe platform to express themselves and access accurate information. The presenters demonstrated how the project bridges gaps left by traditional curricula, challenges cultural taboos, and encourages healthier conversations between students, parents, educators, and communities. Overall, Adventures Too stands as a promising model for empowering youth and fostering informed, confident, and culturally aware generations.





LAUNCH OF UNESCO'S WORLD TRENDS  
IN FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA  
DEVELOPMENT REPORT (2022-2025):

# JOURNALISM: SHAPING A WORLD AT PEACE

**Master of Ceremony:** Ms Ophélie Kukansami Léger, Associate Project Officer, UNESCO  
**Moderator:** Dr Phathiswa Magopeni, Executive Director of the Press Council of South Africa, Board Director of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (South Africa)  
**Speakers:**

- Hon. Ourveena Geereesha Topsy-Sonoo, *Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (Mauritius)*
- Ms Rokhaya Diallo, *Journalist, Filmmaker (France)*

**Session Overview**

The session was convened during the African Women in Media (AWiM) conference to present and discuss UNESCO's upcoming World Trends Report in Freedom of Expression and Media Development and to connect its findings to African and global efforts on gender equality, media resilience, and policy advocacy.

**Opening Remarks**

H.E. Johan Romare, Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden in Ethiopia

- Sweden is a top donor to UNESCO's freedom of expression programs.
- Expressed concern over declining press freedom, especially threats against women journalists.
- Highlighted Sweden's constitutional legacy of freedom of expression (since 1766).
- Noted rising intimidation and self-censorship even in Sweden.
- Called for new solutions from African experiences to reverse negative trends.

**UNESCO Report Presentation**

- **Report Title:** Journalism: Shaping a World at Peace (2022–2025 edition).

**Key Findings:**

- Global freedom of expression peaked in 2012, but has since declined by 10%.
- Major drivers of decline:
- Erosion of checks and balances, weakening institutions.
- Misuse of emerging technologies (AI, disinformation).
- Regression of women's rights and marginalized groups.
- Targeting of journalists, scientists, and activists.
- Economic crisis for independent media.

**Statistics:**

- 72% of world population now lives under authoritarian rule.
- 310+ journalists killed in past 3.5 years; 85% of cases unresolved.

- 73% of women journalists report online attacks; 1 in 5 face physical violence after online harassment.
- **Positive counter-trends:**
- Growth of community media (recognized in nearly half of surveyed countries).
- Rise of collaborative investigative journalism.
- UNESCO initiatives on AI ethics and social media for peace.

**Panel Discussion Highlights**

- **Panelist:**
- Women's voices are systematically silenced through overlapping barriers:
- Online harassment amplifies offline violence.
- Gender disinformation undermines credibility.
- Legal restrictions and cultural rollbacks limit participation.
- Structural exclusion in media ownership and leadership.
- **Biggest barrier:** A systemic "architecture of silencing" across technological, political, economic, and cultural domains.
- **Recommendations:**
- Ensure equitable representation in newsroom leadership.
- Enforce safety protocols and zero tolerance for harassment.
- Demand algorithmic accountability and transparency from tech platforms.
- Governments must support women in media/tech leadership and dismantle harmful stereotypes.
- **Commissioner (ACHPR):**
- Urgent need for **multi-stakeholder action:**
- States must prevent attacks on journalists, repeal criminal defamation laws, and stop internet shutdowns.

- Media must uphold ethical standards and resist disinformation.
- Tech platforms must counter harmful content and misinformation.
- Highlighted **ACHPR Resolutions 630 & 631:**
- Guidelines for monitoring tech companies.
- Standards for public interest content and fact-checking.
- On national security vs. free expression: Restrictions must be demonstrable, limited, and judicially reviewed.
- On conflict zones: Targeting journalists is a war crime; accountability must be enforced.

**Closing Reflections**

- Moderator emphasized the gravity of decline: 72% of global population under authoritarian rule.
- Responsibility to reverse trends lies with governments, regulators, tech platforms, civil society, and journalists themselves.
- Freedom of expression is not only a right but a democratic imperative for peace and resilience.

**Conclusion**

The panel concluded that the UNESCO World Trends Report highlights an urgent global decline in freedom of expression, with women journalists disproportionately targeted by violence, disinformation, and systemic exclusion. Despite these challenges, the discussion emphasized that solutions exist: strengthening newsroom equity, enforcing safety protocols, holding governments and tech platforms accountable, and supporting independent and community media. Ultimately, safeguarding journalism is not only about protecting a profession but about defending democracy, peace, and human dignity, making coordinated action across all sectors essential to reversing current negative trends.

# INTEGRATING AU POLICY FRAMEWORKS INTO MEDIA CONTENT PRACTICAL STRATEGY FOR GENDER RESPONSIVE STORYTELLING

**Moderator:** Toun Okewale Sonaiya  
**Speakers:** Erelu Bisi Adeleye- Fayemil Albright Alitsi

**Overview**  
*This session explored how African Union (AU) policy frameworks can be integrated into media content to promote gender-responsive storytelling. The panel uniquely addressed West Africa and Southern Africa, comparing regional realities and highlighting systemic barriers to women's leadership in media.*

## PRESENTATION SUMMARIES

### Sustainability of Women's Leadership in Newsrooms

**Theme:** Why women leaders in South African media are declining and what can be done to sustain them.

#### Key Findings from Research:

- Leadership decline:** In 2021, 66% of editors in South Africa were women; by 2023, this dropped to 20%.
- Reasons for leaving newsrooms:**
  - Pay inequity:** Women editors were paid less than male predecessors, despite heavier workloads and fewer resources.
  - Safety concerns:** Online bullying, trolling, and physical threats. Coping mechanisms included substance abuse and risky behaviors.
  - Undermined authority:** Women in leadership of-

- ten bypassed or ignored by colleagues.
- Sexual harassment:** Especially prevalent in political reporting, with normalized responses from newsrooms.
  - Burnout:** Stress compounded by lack of organizational support.

#### Illustrative Quotes & Cases:

- "When I was appointed editor, I was paid less, given fewer resources, and expected to do more."
- "Men sent me explicit images while masturbating over my photo—this is online rape."
- Case of Suna Fter (SABC journalist): faced severe harassment, abduction, physical attacks, and was later found dead.

#### Recommendations:

- Fair pay and resource allocation.

- Legal and psychological support for journalists.
- Transparent handling of harassment cases.
- Structural reforms to sustain women's leadership.

### CONFLICT, GENDER BIAS, AND MEDIA IN THE SAHEL

**Theme:** How conflict exacerbates gender inequality in journalism across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

#### Key Insights:

- Conflict worsens discrimination:** Women excluded from decision-making meetings despite being heads of households among IDPs.
- Psychological trauma:** Journalists covering rape and violence suffer vicarious trauma, often coping informally without institutional support.
- Structural barriers:**
  - Women deemed "too fragile" for conflict reporting.
  - Staying in hotels during assignments led to accusations of sex work.
  - Women relegated to "soft" or trauma-related stories.

- Domestic responsibilities and family pressures hindered promotions.
- Paradox of roles:** Women denied "hard" stories but burdened with emotional trauma coverage.
- Representation in media content:** Women portrayed mainly as victims or caregivers, rarely as experts or authorities.

#### Recommendations:

- Balanced opportunities for women in conflict reporting.
- Address benevolent sexism and tokenistic assignments.
- Institutional reforms to support women's advancement.

#### Moderator's Input

- Highlighted challenges in newsroom leadership: none of the six West/Central African newsrooms are led by women.
- External factors (husbands, families, cultural norms) hinder women's promotion.
- Experimenting with hiring "two people for one position" to mitigate dropout risks.

#### Key Cross-Cutting Themes





able business models for women-led media.

**Additional Points:**

- Importance of shaping newsroom culture to include men as caregivers.
- Audience advocacy and solidarity are crucial.
- Risks remain high in authoritarian contexts where protecting journalists can lead to imprisonment.

**Conclusion**

The panel emphasized that gender-responsive storytelling requires systemic transformation across pay structures, safety mechanisms, cultural norms, and institutional accountability. AU policy frameworks must be actively integrated into media practices to:

- Sustain women's leadership in newsrooms.
- Protect journalists from harassment and trauma.
- Ensure balanced representation in conflict reporting.
- Promote financial independence and empowerment.

Ultimately, the discussion underscored that without structural change, women's voices in African media will remain marginalized, despite their resilience and willingness to lead.

- **Structural Inequality:** Pay gaps, harassment, and lack of support drive women out of leadership roles.
- **Conflict Exacerbation:** War environments intensify gender bias, limiting women's participation and advancement.
- **Safety & Trauma:** Journalists face severe psychological and physical threats without adequate institutional support.
- **Cultural & Familial Pressures:** Domestic responsibilities and patriarchal norms restrict women's mobility and career growth.
- **Financial Independence:** Empowerment through fi-

nancial inclusion is critical to sustaining women in media.

- **Need for Systemic Change:** Advocacy, transparency, and AU policy integration are essential for lasting transformation.

**Audience Questions & Key Responses**

- Q1: Difference between media and NGO sectors in the Sahel?
  - A: NGOs have more women leaders; media remains male-dominated. Conflict and rights violations worsened regression.
- Q2: Why regression in Sahelian countries?

- A: War environment disempowers youth; misogynistic mentality sidelines women.
- Q3: Why decline in South Africa despite strong history of women leaders?
  - A: Women remain vocal, but structures are unchanged. Constant struggle is exhausting; higher positions remain male-dominated.
- Q4: What is being done for trauma support?
  - A: Media literacy and trauma training being integrated into journalism schools and curricula.
- Q5: How to address financial independence?
  - A: Financial crisis is a major barrier; need sustain-





FROM MARGIN TO MAINSTREAM:

# STORYTELLING AS ADVOCACY FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS IN MEDIA

**Speakers:** Yemisi Shafe-Adefolaju

**Focus:** Feminist storytelling, media advocacy for girls' rights, African women's empowerment

**Introduction and Symbolism of the Wrapper**

- **Chairman:** Introduced the panel and highlighted the importance of women supporting each other.
- **Panellist:** Shared the story of the wrapper from leadership experience in Atakama:
  - A woman in need was assisted using a wrapper—symbolizing solidarity and compassion.
  - Significance: For every African woman abused, another woman is ready to support her.
  - Emphasized patriarchy as the enemy.

**Media as a Tool for Advocacy**

- **Panelist:**
  - Personal journey in media advocacy began in 1969 in the UK.
  - Developed magazines and media campaigns to showcase women's achievements.
  - Critiqued stereotypical images from UNICEF/UNESCO (pregnant women with children, flies on faces).
  - Advocated for control over women's narrative and positive portrayal of young women.

- Emphasized that African women are strong despite challenges.

**Hopes for Feminist Storytelling in the Next 30 Years**

- Knowledge transfer to younger women is insufficient.
- Feminist storytelling should:
  - Engage women in social and economic institutions.
  - Address cybersecurity threats and digital manipulation.
  - Remain globally aware, not limited to social media activism.
- Encouraged younger women to take ownership of feminist history and knowledge.

**Milestones in Media and Feminist Storytelling**

- **Achievements over 30 years:**
  - Increase in women in newsrooms.
  - Strengthening of documentary production and disability-inclusive narratives.
  - Effective use of social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, TikTok) in Kenya.
- **Challenges:**
  - Need for stronger role models.
  - Avoiding charity-based perception of women and people with disabilities.
    - Cybersecurity and digital abuse threats.
- Opportunities:
  - AI and technology can drive positive impact and inclusiveness.

**Questions and Discussions from Attendees**

- **History and Reconciliation:** Importance of recognizing pre-colonial African women's strength.
- **Western vs. African Feminism:** Need to understand local context and authenticity.
- **Support for Women CEOs and Media Professionals:** Importance of advertising, sponsorship, and mentorship.
- **Masculinity Backlash:** Continued challenge in gender equality.
- **Beijing Conference 30th Anniversary:** Reminder of ongoing struggle; need for radical steps and intergenerational storytelling.
- **Cybersecurity and Online Advocacy:** Emphasis on winning the online space for women's rights.
- **Grassroots Engagement:** Women increasingly active but challenges persist; media prefers spectacle over

substance.

**Key Insights from Panelist**

- **Cultural and Historical Context:**
  - African women historically valued; indigenous systems honored women.
  - FGM should be eradicated; girls must attend school.
- **African Feminist Identity:**
  - African Feminist Charter acknowledges patriarchal structures.
  - Feminism is contextual and authentic to African circumstances.
- **Intersections of Privilege and Gender:**
  - Privilege should be used responsibly to advance feminist causes.
- **Inclusiveness:**
  - Men and boys must be engaged to prevent cycles of violence and marginalization.
  - Ending poverty and marginalization requires equitable educational opportunities for girls.
- **Solidarity:** Inclusive feminism strengthens social change.

**Core Themes and Takeaways**

- **Solidarity and Support:** The wrapper symbolizes communal support for women.
- **Control over Narrative:** Women must define their own stories in media.
- **Digital Activism:** Social media and AI offer tools but also challenges (digital abuse, depoliticization).
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Intergenerational learning is crucial for sustaining feminist progress.
- **Inclusivity:** Gender equality efforts must involve men, boys, and people with disabilities.
- **African Feminist Identity:** Authentic, contextual, and historically informed feminist advocacy is vital.





BEYOND THE HEADLINES:

# REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE ON FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

**Speakers:** Ann Njuguna, *The Girl Generation- Options Consultancy Services* | Dr Leyla Hussein, *Options Consultancy Services*.

**Session Overview**

The panel convened under the Girl Generation program, explored the role of language, media, survivor voices, and legal frameworks in reframing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. The session featured survivors, activists, journalists, and advocates from across Africa, Asia, and the diaspora. It emphasized that FGM is not a cultural practice but a form of violence, torture, and human rights violation.

**KEY THEMES**

**Language as Power**

- Language shapes whether FGM is seen as “tradition” or criminal assault.
- Euphemisms such as “practice,” “harmful culture,” or “female circumcision” normalize violence and obscure its brutality.
- Survivor-led Position Paper on Language calls for intentional, reflective framing:
  - FGM = violence against women and girls, torture, sexual assault, child abuse, trauma.
  - Survivors must define their own descriptors (“cut,”

- “mutilated,” etc.).
- Parallels drawn with other violence: “domestic violence” minimizes severity compared to “assault.”

**Survivor Voices at the Forefront**

- Survivors are the most powerful advocates; politicians and donors cannot argue against lived testimony.
- Long-term survivor engagement (e.g., 21 in Kenya, 20 in Senegal, Ethiopia, and Somaliland) builds sustained narrative shifts.
- Survivor-led documentaries in the UK reframed FGM as child abuse, catalyzing petitions and policy change.

**Media Responsibility and Bias**

- Media often relegates FGM to “features” or symbolic coverage (e.g., Zero Tolerance Day).
- Violence against black and brown girls is minimized as “tradition,” while similar acts against white girls are reported as sexual assault.
- Continuous reporting, as seen with femicide in Kenya, drives public mobilization and government action.
- Journalists face threats, censorship, and ethical dilemmas, especially when interviewing minors or confronting communities.

**Global Comparisons and Hypocrisy**

- France: No separate FGM Act; prosecutes under child protection and assault laws → highest convictions globally.
- UK: Separate FGM Act criticized as racist for singling out black children; fewer convictions.
- U.S.: Has not signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; child marriage and FGM remain legal in some states.
- Asia (Indonesia, Singapore): High prevalence, often medicalized, falsely legitimizing FGM as a “procedure.”
- Western cosmetic surgeries (labiaplasty): Mirror FGM type I/II but framed as “choice” or “enhancement,” exposing racial double standards.

**Trauma and Disability**

- Survivors face lifelong trauma, including PTSD triggered during intimacy or marriage.
- FGM can cause permanent disability (broken bones, paralysis, and compounded vulnerability for disabled children).
- These dimensions are underreported but critical for advocacy.

**Economic and Political Systems**

- FGM, cosmetic surgeries, and body modifications are tied to capitalist economies.
- Politicians resist eradication of practices that generate profit, framing them as “culture” or “choice.”
- Advocacy must expose the economic interests sustaining violence.

**Culture vs. Violence**

- True culture is food, music, spirituality—not violence.
- Africans must reject imposed narratives that claim FGM as “African culture.”

- Parallel challenge: slavery and colonization are not considered “white culture”; violence should not be claimed as cultural identity.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**For Media**

- **Sustain coverage:** Report FGM daily, not only on symbolic dates.
- **Name violence accurately:** Use terms like “sexual assault” and “child abuse,” not “practice” or “tradition.”
- **Center survivors:** Prioritize survivor voices over community elders or perpetrators.
- **Challenge bias:** Avoid racialized framing that minimizes violence against black and brown girls.

**For Policymakers**

- **Integrate FGM into child protection laws:** Treat it as assault, abuse, and torture, not cultural exception.
- **Learn from France:** Universal laws yield stronger convictions than separate FGM acts.
- **Address trauma and disability:** Provide survivor-centered health and psychosocial support.
- **Reject euphemisms in policy:** Frame FGM as gender-based violence and human rights violation.

**For Donors and International Institutions**

- **Fund survivor-led initiatives:** Long-term engagement builds authentic narrative shifts.
- **Challenge imposed language:** Avoid frameworks that dilute violence into “harmful practices.”
- **Support independent African media:** Empower local journalists to reclaim narratives.
- **Acknowledge global parallels:** Address cosmetic surgeries and body control systems alongside FGM.

**Conclusion**

The panel underscored that language is not neutral: it can either perpetuate minimization or catalyze justice. FGM is not culture—it is violence, torture, and discrimination. Survivor voices, continuous media reporting, and universal child protection laws are essential to dismantle harmful narratives and drive systemic change.





FROM TOKENISM TO TRANSFORMATION:

# DISCOURSES ON GENDER AND RACE IN AFRICAN MEDIA

**Moderator:** Scheherazade Safla-Gaffoor, Northwestern University, Qatar  
**Speakers:** Leyla Burcu Dündar, Başkent University | Gladys Asare-Danquah, Burgundy Africe || Mamaponya Motsai, fraycollege | Amal Omar Ba Qatyan, American University in Cairo

**Overview**  
*This session examined how African women are portrayed in media, questioning whether visibility equates to genuine agency. The panel highlighted the persistence of tokenism, the need for structural transformation in media institutions, and the role of literature and digital activism in reshaping narratives.*

**PRESENTATION SUMMARIES**

**BEYOND VISIBILITY: DECONSTRUCTING TOKENISM**

**Theme:** Women’s visibility in media remains symbolic rather than transformative.

**Key Findings (from systematic literature review across 12 African countries):**

- **Gender representation & stereotypes:** Women depicted as emotional, weak, caregivers, or victims; men as leaders and decision-makers.
- **Visibility vs. ownership:** Women appear in media but lack editorial power and narrative authority.
- **Symbolic inclusion:** Women showcased during symbolic events (e.g., International Women’s Day) without substantive contribution.
- **Intersectionality ignored:** Media homogenizes

women, overlooking race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and age differences.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide targeted funding for women-led media organizations.
- Encourage longitudinal and intersectional research.
- Adopt gender-responsive media policies with monitoring mechanisms.
- Capacity building and mentorship for women journalists.
- Ensure access to media spaces, technology, and leadership roles.

**INSTITUTIONALIZING GENDER SENSITIVITY IN NEWSROOMS**

**Theme:** Moving from policy to practice through institutionalized training.

**Key Points:**

- Policies often exist but remain unused; institutionalization ensures they become part of newsroom culture.
- Pilot project with GIZ in South Africa developed a gender sensitivity course for journalism schools and newsrooms.
- **Course modules:**
  - Basics of gender, feminist media theory, and unconscious bias.
  - Legal and normative frameworks (laws often ignored in reporting).
  - Reporting on GBV and supporting female journalists against harassment.
  - Creating gender-sensitive newsrooms and empowering journalists to hold editors accountable.

**Implementation:**

- Piloted at Wits Journalism School and SABC.
- Journalists required to pledge commitments to diverse sourcing and gender-sensitive practices.
- Aim: make the course mandatory for all journalism students and newsroom staff.

**LITERATURE AS A MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

**Theme:** Literature and art as transformative tools for dismantling stereotypes.

**Key Points:**

- Literature magnifies lived experiences and reveals emotional/psychological harm caused by GBV.
- Fiction captures trauma and enables imagining alternative futures.
- Literature challenges stereotypes and patriarchal norms, offering freedom and possibility.
- Example: Freshwater and other works show how storytelling reshapes cultural understanding of gender.

**Conclusion:**

- Art and media together demonstrate how storytelling becomes a powerful tool for social change.

**DIGITAL FEMINISM AND ACTIVISM IN IRAN**

**Theme:** Social media as a tool for resistance against authoritarian restrictions.

**Key Points:**

- Case of Iranian women killed for not wearing hijab properly sparked protests.
- Government repression: imprisonment, killings, internet

- bans.
- Social media (#feminism, Twitter) enabled women to bypass censorship, cut hair in protest, and gain international attention.
- Digital activism fostered new political engagement and solidarity despite risks.

**Key Cross-Cutting Themes**

- **Tokenism vs. Transformation:** Visibility without agency perpetuates symbolic inclusion.
- **Structural Change Needed:** Policies must be monitored and institutionalized to ensure impact.
- **Training & Literacy:** Mandatory gender sensitivity training for journalists is essential.
- **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Literature and art complement media in challenging stereotypes.
- **Digital Activism:** Social media empowers marginalized voices but faces state repression.
- **Intersectionality:** Women’s diverse identities must be acknowledged in media representation.

**Audience Questions & Key Responses**

- **Q1:** How to balance societal norms with gender-sensitive newsrooms?
  - **A:** Challenge norms gradually; tailor approaches to each country’s context and audience capacity.
- **Q2:** Has the gender sensitivity course been implemented?
  - **A:** Piloted voluntarily; 73% completion rate. Plans to make it mandatory with grading.
- **Q3:** Is the course publicly available?
  - **A:** Open but not yet on the website.
- **Q4:** Plans to introduce training at younger levels?
  - **A:** Yes, media literacy should be part of school curricula to instill awareness early.
- **Q5:** Effectiveness of #movements?
  - **A:** Social media activism (e.g., hijab protests) has influenced cultural shifts and international solidarity.

**Conclusion**

The panel emphasized that true inclusion requires structural transformation, not symbolic visibility. Women must move beyond being portrayed as victims or symbols to becoming decision-makers and narrative shapers. Institutionalized training, interdisciplinary approaches, and digital activism are key pathways to dismantling tokenism and fostering genuine transformation in African and global media.





# THE MEDIA'S IMPACT ON GENDER JUSTICE, PEACE BUILDING, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

**Moderator:** Rebecca Mutiso, Media Council of Kenya  
**Speakers:** Enatnesh Muluken Fetene, Wollo University | Janet Matli, TWR Malawi

**Focus**  
*Exploring how media influences gender justice, peacebuilding, and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals*

**Introduction**

- **Chairperson:** Opened the workshop, emphasizing the critical role of media in shaping public understanding of gender equality, peace, and sustainable development.
- **Objective:** Examine the intersection between media representation, social change, and achieving the SDGs.

**Media and Gender Justice**

- **Panelists' Key Points:**
  - Media is a powerful tool for advocating women's rights and challenging harmful gender norms.
  - Positive storytelling highlights women's achievements and exposes inequalities.
  - Gender-sensitive reporting can reduce discrimination and encourage policy change.

• **Challenges Identified:**

- Persistent stereotypes and underrepresentation of women in media leadership roles.
- Sensationalism often overshadows substantive reporting on gender issues.
- Limited access to media platforms for marginalized communities.

• **Best Practices:**

- Use participatory media approaches that amplify women's voices.
- Showcase local and indigenous perspectives on gender justice.
- Adopt accountability frameworks for fair and ethical reporting.

**Media's Role in Peacebuilding**

- **Key Insights:**
  - Media can promote dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict resolution.
  - Responsible reporting helps reduce tensions in conflict-prone regions.
  - Storytelling of grassroots peace initiatives inspires societal participation.
- **Case Examples:**
  - Local radio programs in conflict-affected areas promoting women-led peace initiatives.
  - Social media campaigns highlighting youth engagement in peace processes.
- **Challenges:**
  - Misinformation, propaganda, and biased reporting can exacerbate conflicts.
  - Digital platforms can amplify hate speech if not monitored.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Invest in media literacy programs for citizens.
  - Encourage collaboration between journalists, peacebuilders, and policymakers.
  - Promote inclusive narratives that represent all voices, including women, youth, and marginalized groups.

**Media and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

- **Key SDGs Linked to Media:**
  - Goal 5: Gender Equality – Media advocacy empowers women and promotes policy change.
  - Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions – Media fosters transparency, civic engagement, and non-violent conflict resolution.
  - Goal 4 & 10: Education and Reduced Inequalities – Media campaigns raise awareness about access to education and social equity.
- **Opportunities:**
  - Digital media can expand awareness of global goals to local communities.
  - Data-driven journalism highlights progress and gaps in SDG implementation.
  - Multimedia storytelling engages youth and stakeholders effectively.
- **Threats/Challenges:**
  - Unequal media access, especially in rural areas, limits impact.
  - Misrepresentation of data can mislead public perception of SDG progress.

- Cybersecurity threats and digital manipulation can undermine credibility.

**Panel Discussion Highlights**

- **Audience Questions & Comments:**
  - How can media balance reporting on gender justice without sensationalizing cases of violence?
  - How can women and marginalized groups be given more leadership in media organizations?
  - Strategies to combat online hate speech while promoting inclusive narratives.
- **Panelists' Insights:**
  - Media must intentionally center marginalized voices in content creation.
  - Collaboration between media, civil society, and governments strengthens advocacy impact.
  - Continuous capacity building for journalists on gender and peace issues is essential.

**Key Takeaways**

- **Solidarity & Representation:** Media must amplify the voices of women and marginalized communities to achieve justice.
- **Narrative Control:** Communities should define their own stories, avoiding imposed narratives.
- **Digital Engagement:** Social media and technology offer tools to promote peace and SDG awareness but require careful monitoring.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Sustainable impact depends on training and mentoring future journalists and activists.
- **Inclusivity:** Achieving gender justice and peace requires involvement of all stakeholders, including men, youth, and persons with disabilities.
- **Accountability:** Media reporting must adhere to ethical standards and prioritize substance over spectacle.

**Recommendations for Future Action**

- Strengthen media literacy programs focusing on gender and peace issues.
- Support women and marginalized groups in media leadership.
- Promote participatory storytelling for SDGs implementation.
- Develop ethical guidelines for online and digital media advocacy.
- Foster partnerships between media, civil society, and international organizations.





RESILIENT VOICES:

# SAHEL AND SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN MEDIA

**Moderator:** Caroline Vuillemin, Fondation Hironnelle  
**Speakers:** Dr Emma Heywood, University of Sheffield | Mamaponya Motsai, Fraycollege

**Overview**

*This panel brought together media professionals, advocates, and participants to explore how storytelling can be used as a strategic tool for advocacy, particularly in advancing gender equality and challenging stereotypes in media. The session combined personal reflections, group case studies, and the introduction of the SHIFT Framework for narrative change.*

**Objectives**

- To understand storytelling as a strategy for advocacy.
- To highlight how stories provide “data with soul” – moving audiences beyond statistics.
- To introduce the SHIFT Framework for crafting advocacy narratives.
- To examine African Union and continental policy frameworks on gender and media.
- To engage participants in interactive activities that connect theory with lived experience.

**SESSION FLOW**

**Icebreaker: Sharing Stories**

Participants shared personal or observed stories that revealed gender stereotypes:

- **Advertisements** portraying women as responsible for cooking and men as passive consumers.

- **Songs and rhymes** reinforcing traditional gender roles (e.g., women in kitchens, men in public spaces).
  - **Everyday experiences** of patriarchy, such as men disregarding queues or women being denied service unless accompanied by men.
  - **Media representations** that normalize men as doctors/engineers and women as nurses or caregivers.
- These stories illustrated how culture and media reinforce stereotypes, often unconsciously.

**Discussion: Culture or Misbehavior?**

- Participants debated whether such behaviors are isolated incidents or rooted in cultural norms.
- Consensus: stereotypes are systemic and cultural, reinforced by media, education, and socialization.
- Example: children assuming female professionals are nurses, not doctors, due to textbook depictions.

**Why Storytelling Matters for Advocacy**

- Stories shape perception and influence emotions more than raw data.
- They create lasting impressions and foster connection, moving audiences to action.
- Media narratives hold power: they don’t tell people how to think, but what to think about.
- Strategic storytelling is essential for structural change and mainstreaming gender equality in media.

**Introducing the SHIFT Framework**

A structured approach to advocacy storytelling:

| Component                              | Purpose                                                 | Example                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S – Spotlight the Issue                | Define the problem clearly                              | Only 24% of voices in African media are women (Global Gender Monitoring Project, 2020). |
| H – Humanize with Lived Experience     | Elevate real stories, use characters, emotion, settings | A rural Kenyan mother empowered through sustainable farming.                            |
| I – Illuminate Context and Root Causes | Explain systemic/ policy factors                        | Lack of enforcement of gender representation codes.                                     |
| F – Frame for Impact                   | Show desired change and concrete outcomes               | Newsroom policies ensuring women’s voices are included.                                 |
| T – Tie to Action                      | Provide clear call to action                            | Advocate for policy change, donate, volunteer, and amplify content.                     |

**Group Case Studies (Media Grouping)**

Participants applied the SHIFT framework to real headlines and narratives:

- **Case Study 1: Girl Excels in Global Tech Competition**
  - Problem: Headline emphasized her rural background, diminishing her achievement.
  - Reframe: Focus on her excellence, then contextualize access and representation in tech.
  - Action: Policies to expand rural access to STEM, electricity, and internet.
- **Case Study 2: Beauty Queen Turned Politician**
  - Problem: Sensationalized headline reinforced stereotypes, ignored her leadership.
  - Reframe: Emphasize her political track record, goals, and agency.
  - Action: Encourage engagement with her achievements, not appearance.
- **Case Study 3: Teenage Mother Finds Hope in**

**Coding**

- Problem: Narrative focused on stigma and pregnancy, not her aspirations.
- Reframe: Highlight her agency, coding skills, and potential.
- Action: Expand programs for young mothers, adapt education to realities, shift cultural norms.
- **Case Study 4: Female Journalist Faces Online Harassment**
  - Problem: Story framed harassment as personal, not systemic.
  - Reframe: Connect to broader issues of gender-based violence and online safety.
  - Action: Equal opportunity policies, stronger protections for women journalists.

**Closing Reflections**

- Storytelling is a mechanism for policy advocacy: it can make AU frameworks and protocols accessible to everyday citizens.
- Participants were urged to take the SHIFT framework back to their communities and workplaces, applying it to reshape narratives.
- Emphasis: women’s issues are daily issues, not confined to symbolic “International Days.”
- Call to action: each participant is a change agent, responsible for amplifying stories that drive equality and justice.

**Key Takeaways**

- **Stories are advocacy tools:** they transform statistics into human-centered narratives that inspire change.
- **Media perpetuates stereotypes:** advertisements, songs, and everyday practices reinforce gender roles.
- **Culture vs. misbehavior:** stereotypes are systemic, not isolated incidents.
- **SHIFT Framework** provides a practical method for crafting impactful advocacy narratives.
- **Action orientation is essential:** advocacy stories must end with a clear call to action.

**Conclusion**

The workshop highlighted that storytelling is central to advocacy in media. By reframing narratives through the SHIFT framework, advocates can challenge stereotypes, amplify marginalized voices, and drive structural change. Stories are not just anecdotes – they are data with soul, capable of transforming perception and mobilizing action.





# UTILIZING INFORMATION INTEGRITY AND PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMBAT TECH-FACILITATED GBV

## OPENING REMARKS

### Moderator: Noor Ahmed

- Introduced Resolution 631 on information integrity, aligned with UNESCO's mandate.
- UNESCO supports MOXII Africa through multi-sector engagement and multi-stakeholder approaches to media governance.
- UNESCO has supported SOS on Resolution 631.

### Current State of Affairs

- Resolutions 620, 630, and 631 focus on regulating tech companies.
- Resolution 630: Guidelines for monitoring technology companies and upholding information integrity.
- Resolution 631: Assessing public-interest content across platforms; developed with SOS.

- The Commission will approve the guidelines; it will later determine whether new laws or existing directives are adequate.
- Africa faces wide pushback due to fast-spreading disinformation, fueling tech-facilitated GBV.
- UNESCO and MOXII Africa lobby tech companies to accept responsibility and intervene quickly when misinformation spreads.
- Call to Participants: Submit input and feedback through the online consultation portal.

### Panel Discussion

- Rapid tech growth brings new risks: hate speech, tech-facilitated GBV, impersonation, image-based abuse.
- Maintaining information integrity is urgent alongside accountability.

## KEY PRESENTATION – REGULATORY GAPS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### Where are the accountability gaps highest?

- MOXII Africa met with tech companies at the Commission offices: tech companies come with their own agendas.
- **Regulatory frameworks operate in three ways:**
  - **Obligations:** States set enforceable duties.
  - **Human rights baselines:** Minimum standards and pressure mechanisms.
  - **Pathways to accountability:** Clear frameworks for compliance and action.

### Country Examples:

- **Kenya:** Prohibits identity-related crimes like impersonation and false publication.

- **South Africa:** Film Publication Act addresses cases such as publication of rape involving minors or personal information.

### Human Rights Framework:

- UN Guiding Principles → due diligence obligations for states and platforms.
- Frameworks help states apply pressure and enforce obligations.

### How Can States Hold Tech Companies Accountable?

- All stakeholders must be involved: CSOs, academia, government, communities.
- Cyber laws exist (e.g., in Kenya), but CSOs continue to play a vital role in advocacy.



ROLE OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN INFORMATION INTEGRITY

Five Key Gaps Identified:

- **Weak enforcement:** Slow responses and lack of reporting channels.
- **Language & localization:** Safety tools not available in local languages (e.g., Swahili); platforms are not transparent and lack gender-related categories.
- **Limited data access:** Hard to quantify scale and harm.
- **State inaction & inadequate solutions:** Policies exist but are weakly implemented.
- **Limited newsroom engagement:** Journalists lack mechanisms for participation and feedback.

Recommendations

- Strengthen legal foundations.
- Apply the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Increase transparency, gender responsiveness, and localization by platforms.

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS & INTERVENTIONS

Point One:

- Asked what African values should be built into platform guidelines.
- Advocated for additional frameworks harmonizing values across African countries.

Point Two

- Cyberbullying is widespread.
- Officials receive fast responses; ordinary women journalists do not.
- Enforcement gap is the main barrier.

Point Three

- Asked if there exists an index quantifying economic loss due to digital gender gaps.

Response:

- Values guide guidelines; they are listed in the introduction.
- Harassment redress is slow and ineffective in many



- countries (e.g., South Africa).
- Digital platforms amplify societal problems.
- Economic research is urgently needed to show governments the cost of gender gaps.

Response:

- Content values must be rooted in human rights.
- Enforcement challenges persist because some media entities work against progress.
- Linking gender digital gaps to economic impact is a strong strategy.

Consultation and QR-Based Feedback Session

- Participants invited to contribute via email and QR code.
- Major challenges identified from the survey:

Q1: Biggest information integrity challenge in Africa?

Answer: Disinformation.

Q2: Why do we need guidelines now?

Answer:

- To ensure online information is trustworthy.
- To safeguard digital safety, accountability, fact-checking, and integrity.

Q3: What comes to mind when hearing “state monitoring of platforms”?

Answer:

- **Censorship** – Restrictions on media content that limit freedom of expression and hinder open dialogue on gender equality.
- **Surveillance** – Monitoring of journalists and media spaces that can create fear, reduce safety, and under-

mine trust

Q4: What principles should guide state monitoring?

- Ethics
- Privacy
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Public good
- Do no harm
- Inclusion
- Representation
- Human rights

Public Good – Clarified

- Users must be educated on data consent and how platforms use it.
- States should develop laws on protection of personal information.
- Doctor Mageba emphasized the need for transparency mandates, public service content, and accountability requirements.

Q5: What legal/policy changes are needed?

- Make tech companies accountable to their own policies.
- Restrict harmful third-party use of data.
- Protect users from gender-based attacks.
- Maintain media freedom from state control.
- Establish clear, enforceable platform guidelines.

Q6: What role should digital platforms play?

- Comply with safety and rights-based obligations.
- Avoid privacy infringement.
- Support fact-checking institutions.
- Detect data/image manipulation.
- Ensure only accurate, verified content circulates.
- Continually update platform policies.

Safety by Design

- Should be built from the bottom up, starting with vulnerable groups.

Q7: What partnership model can improve oversight?

Co-creation and shared ownership.

Multi-stakeholder advocacy councils.

Independent monitoring bodies reporting to states.

Regional collaboration (AU, IGAD).

CSOs should serve as oversight bodies.

CLOSING REMARKS

Noor Ahmed

- Stressed need for clear accountability.
- Emphasized protecting women online.
- Called for an African-led model of digital safety.

Lydia Kembabazi

- Highlighted collaboration as essential.
- Urged communities to reject GBV as a societal norm.

Ivy Gikonyo

- Final reminder: progress requires collective effort.

Conclusion

The session emphasized the rising urgency of safeguarding information integrity and ensuring platform accountability to combat tech-facilitated gender-based violence in Africa. While frameworks such as Resolutions 620, 630, and 631 establish strong foundations for regulating technology companies, major challenges remain—particularly weak enforcement, insufficient localization, limited access to data, and minimal state action. Disinformation and digital abuse continue to escalate, disproportionately harming women journalists and vulnerable groups.

Speakers highlighted that accountability requires multi-stakeholder collaboration across governments, academia, civil society, tech companies, and regional bodies. African values, human rights principles, and localized approaches must guide the design of platform governance. Participants repeatedly noted the importance of independent oversight, strong policy implementation, enhanced digital literacy, and safety-by-design principles that prioritize the protection of marginalized communities.

The session concluded with a shared call for an African-led, human-rights-centered, multi-sector model for digital governance—one that ensures safe, inclusive, and accountable online spaces for all, especially women affected by tech-facilitated GBV.





# AU-CEVAWG & KIGALI DECLARATION COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE ROUNDTABLES BEIJING DECLARATION, KIGALI DECLARATION & STRENGTHENING MEDIA RESPONSES TO GBV

**Moderator:** Professor Oluyinka Esan (African Women in Media Board Chair) | Lindiwe Mugabe (UN Women/AUC-Women, Gender and Youth Directorate)

**Opening Speakers:** Dr Yemisi Akinbobola, African Women in Media | Zanele Zanwe, Partnerships for Prevention of Gender-based Violence in Southern Africa | Sylvia Adongo, UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa

## Opening Remarks

The session opened with reflections on the Beijing Declaration, the Kigali Declaration, and previous guiding frameworks that continue to shape gender-responsive media practice in Africa. Participants were encouraged to reflect on:

- What has been learned over the past days
  - What actions should follow
  - How to convert discussions into concrete commitments
- The aim of the roundtable was to sit together, reflect, and co-design the next steps toward safer digital spaces and improved protection for women journalists.

The panelists were invited to provide perspectives on the Ki-

gali Declaration and pathways to establishing a Community of Practice on gender-sensitive media.

## Key Remarks from Dr. Yemisi Akinbobola

- Proposed forming a Community of Practice around the Kigali Declaration.
- Highlighted that several communities already exist (e.g., AI, ethics) — each owning a thematic area.
- Monthly dialogue series will be launched.
- Emphasized networking as a core post-conference strategy.
- The objective is to leave the conference with a clear action map.

- The Kigali Declaration provides guiding principles for implementation.

## Moderator's Introduction

The moderator introduced the speakers and highlighted:

- Sylvia's eight years of communication experience in the NGO sector.
- Appreciation for AWiM for successfully hosting the conference during the 16 Days of Activism.
- UNESCO's launch of the "Reclaiming the Digital Space" report.

## KEY MESSAGES

### Media Systemic Barriers

- The media environment is hermetic and excludes minorities.
- Women face precarious labor conditions, lack stable contracts, and experience a persistent wage gap.
- They are severely underrepresented in decision-making roles.

- Whistleblowers face professional reprisals → contributes to a culture of silencing.

## Impact on Women

- Combined systemic effects send a message: women cannot speak freely.
- Structural discrimination is reinforced by politicians, scientists, and influential actors.

## Necessary Measures

- Address systemic barriers and ensure equitable representation.
- Adopt inclusive editorial practices and workplace protections.
- Extend protection to the digital sphere, where platforms and governments shape visibility.
- Tackle harmful stereotypes, political narratives, and LGBTQ+ phobia.
- Recognize that protecting women journalists is fundamental to peacebuilding.

## KEY INTERVENTIONS

### Multi-Stakeholder Action

- States must actively protect women journalists from:
  - Kidnapping
  - Intimidation
  - Online/offline threats
  - Unlawful surveillance

### Legal & Policy Measures

- **Punish perpetrators;** ensure accountability.
- Review **criminal defamation laws.**
- Prevent unnecessary closures of media houses.
- Ban **internet shutdowns** before, during, and after elections.
- Ensure the press can freely observe events in the country.
- Combat misinformation with concrete, coordinated action.

### On Security Restrictions

- Temporary, justified, and time-bound security measures may be allowed — but must comply with international law and not silence journalists.

### On African Human Rights Resolutions (630 & 631)

- Resolution 630: monitoring Technology Company practices.
- Resolution 631: promoting public-interest content online.
- These create “soft law” foundations for developing modern regulations.

### Additional Insights from Participants

Women journalists face intersecting abuses and online harassment.

No single actor can address the threats → requires collective action.

Regional platforms must prioritize digital safety.

Algorithms influence visibility; women’s voices must be protected and amplified.

Need for continent-wide coalitions and institutional reforms. Threats are collective → solutions must be collective.

## AU–CEVAWG INTERVENTION

### Progress

- 30 years into implementing the Beijing Declaration.
- Progress observed:
  - Women in top media positions have increased from 24% to 27%.
- However, major challenges persist:
  - GBV regression
  - Harassment
  - Systemic barriers

A formal report will be released soon.

### Importance of AU–CEVAWG

- Strengthens gender-sensitive media roles.
- Challenges stereotypes and protects dignity of women.
- Supports anti-harassment measures and digital safety.
- Provides legal grounding for zero tolerance toward GBV.

### Practical Actions Needed

- Encourage journalists to track follow-up actions.
- Media organizations should request training.
- Use data from online observatories.
- UNESCO remains committed to fighting GBV on the continent.

### Key Contributions

- AU–CEVAWG is crucial for guiding media responsibilities.
- Aligns with newsroom policies and ethical standards.
- Encourages survivor-centered reporting.
- Ensures trauma-informed interviewing.
- Requires collaboration with CSOs, community leaders, and media stakeholders.
- Kigali Declaration provides a roadmap for operationalizing AU conventions within media houses.
- Capacity building is essential:
  - Gender-sensitive practice manuals
  - Training journalists
  - Institutionalizing gender sensitivity

### The “Step It Up” Initiative

- Capacity-building program for GBV and gender-sensitive reporting.
- Developed to support media and educational organizations in gender-responsive policy.
- Aims to mobilize technical support and create sustainable structures for safe media environments.

### Closing & Breakout Instructions



The main moderator guided participants through breakout session instructions and emphasized that this moment is part of a broader journey toward a safer media environment for African women journalists.

### Conclusion

Over the two-day discussions, stakeholders critically examined the Beijing and Kigali Declarations, identifying both progress and persistent barriers in ensuring the safety and inclusion of women journalists across Africa. While women now hold 27% of top media positions—a slight improvement from 24%—they continue to face systemic discrimination, online harassment, intimidation, and exclusion from decision-making spaces.

Speakers emphasized that media freedom, digital safety, gender equality, and platform accountability are interdependent, and meaningful change requires coordinated, multi-stakeholder action. State actors must end harmful practices such as internet shutdowns and impunity for violence against journalists, while media houses must institutionalize gender-sensitive editorial standards and support women in both physical and digital spaces.

Regional instruments such as ACHPR Resolutions 630 and 631, the Kigali Declaration, and AU–CEVAWG provide strong guiding frameworks, but implementation must be strengthened. Collective action, continent-wide coalitions, trauma-informed reporting, evidence-based policymaking, and capacity building are essential pathways forward.

The conference marked not an end but the beginning of a continuous dialogue, with plans to develop Communities of Practice, monthly dialogue series, and structured collaborations. Stakeholders left with a shared commitment to transform African media into a safer, more equitable, and more accountable environment for women journalists.

## CONSOLIDATED FEEDBACK DISCUSSION GROUPS

### Communities of Practice

- Fewer groups formed than initially planned due to participant preferences.
- Final outcome: five groups convened.
- Lesson: participants should be aligned with areas relevant to their work to avoid attrition.

### Group on Integrity of Media & Information

- **Most popular group;** largest attendance.
- Focus areas:
  - Integrity of media and information.
  - Monitoring and accountability.
  - Positive masculinity (emerged unexpectedly as a sub-theme).

Observation: limited engagement with legal declarations and gender-based issues — highlighting gaps to address.

### Group on Media & Digital Safety

- Key priorities:





- **Platform accountability** (AU seen as lead actor).
- **Capacity building** (training modules for journalists, media organizations, educators).
- Resources needed: funding, technical expertise, government and civil society partnerships.
- Indicators of success: adoption of media ethics policies addressing digital safety within 6–12 months.

#### Group on Information Integrity

- Explored alignment between **Kigali Declaration** and **AU Convention**.
- Opportunities identified:
  - Shared protection for journalists, fact-checkers, and creators.
  - Integration of ethical journalism and fact-checking into national strategies.
  - Gender-sensitive data collection.
- Priority actions:
  - Awareness campaigns on both frameworks.
  - Regional training packages for journalists.

- Research on misinformation and coordinated online attacks.

#### Group on Women & Digital Safety

- Focus: alignment between Kigali Declaration and AU-CEVANG Framework.
- Priority actions:
  - Protection guidelines for women in digital spaces.
  - Awareness campaigns and training on online gender-based violence.
  - National ratification and review of key provisions.
- Partners: UNESCO, UN Women, academia, women's associations, influencers.
- Accountability mechanisms: data collection, policy reviews, roundtables, and progress reports.
- Timeline: January–June 2026 — awareness raising, training, and advocacy for ratification.

#### Group on Positive Masculinity

- Small group but strong discussions.
- Defined and promoted positive masculinity using Kigali

Declaration as a newsroom guide.

- Stakeholders: CSOs, faith leaders, traditional leaders, tech platforms.
- Actions:
  - Policy development and gender audits.
  - Creating safe editorial spaces.
  - Redefining manhood to broaden participation.
- Barrier: budget constraints.
- Success measure: alignment of policies with Kigali Declaration.

#### Group on Monitoring & Accountability

- Focused on:
  - Educating media on accurate reporting.
  - Conversations with platforms for accountability.
  - Monitoring platform use for gender-sensitive discussions.
- Emphasis on both individual and organizational responsibility.

#### Conference Reflections & Takeaways

- Shared keywords: Collaboration, Commitment, Inclusion,

Accountability, and Awareness.

- Recognition of need for continued dialogue to deepen understanding of policy instruments.
- Networking and friendships seen as valuable outcomes.
- Call to action: move from discussion to implementation.
- Encouragement to convene communities of practice regularly over the next six months.

The rapporteur's listening exercise captured diverse group discussions, each contributing concrete actions and reflections. Across all groups, common themes emerged:

- Collaboration across stakeholders.
- Awareness raising on declarations and conventions.
- Capacity building for journalists and media actors.
- Policy alignment and accountability mechanisms.

The conference marked a shift from dialogue toward implementation, with participants committing to measurable actions in the next 6–12 months.

# OVERALL CONCLUSION

The African Women in Media (AWiM) Conference convened policymakers, media leaders, academics, technologists, civil society, and international partners to address the urgent challenge of building gender-safe media ecosystems across Africa. A clear message emerged: gender equality in media requires systemic transformation, accountability, and sustained investment in women-led initiatives. Violence against women in media, both offline and online, remains pervasive, and while frameworks such as the AU Convention to End Violence against Women in Media exist, ratification and enforcement remain limited. Closing this gap demands collective responsibility, ensuring that safety is treated as a fundamental right rather than a privilege.

Governments must move beyond symbolic legislation to enforce robust protections, while technology companies must recognize their role as gatekeepers of digital spaces. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence and digital innovation have not been matched by adequate investment in content moderation and user safety, leaving women vulnerable to harassment and exploitation. Civil society was urged to continue advocacy, pressing for stronger accountability and cultural transformation alongside legal and technological interventions. The recognition that digital violence is real violence reinforced the urgency of coordinated action.

Panel discussions highlighted that while many African states have introduced policies to promote gender equity in media, enforcement remains inconsistent. Examples from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Morocco illustrate varied approaches, yet all point

to the same conclusion: policies without compliance mechanisms are ineffective. Effective regulation requires quotas to ensure women's visibility, gender-disaggregated data to drive accountability, funding incentives tied to equity, and public accountability mechanisms such as audits and penalties. Regulation must be paired with enforcement, and enforcement must be backed by reliable data and investment frameworks that shift ownership and leadership dynamics in favor of women.

Financial resilience was identified as essential for editorial independence. Women-led media outlets, often small and underfunded, face disproportionate challenges in competing with larger stations. Strategies for resilience included diversifying revenue streams, adopting product thinking, prioritizing audience engagement, and succession planning. Innovation was framed not only as invention but as adaptation, with women-led outlets experimenting with new business models while also managing burnout through sustainable publishing practices.

The conference also underscored the need for stronger accountability in addressing gender-based violence. Journalists must move beyond superficial coverage to investigative reporting that demands accountability. Workplace harassment remains widespread, requiring model policies, training, and survivor support. Digital misogyny, including trolling, revenge porn, and child exploitation, demands stronger platform moderation, localized detection, and proactive bans. Weak accountability mechanisms, patriarchal norms, and

inadequate collaboration continue to hinder progress, reinforcing the need for cultural transformation alongside legal and technological measures.

Discussions on the digital future of public service media emphasized the fragmented media environment, the influence of unregulated digital creators, and the risks of misinformation. Strengthened guidelines for credible, inclusive, and culturally sensitive content are essential, alongside media literacy and ethical frameworks to empower audiences and creators. Balancing freedom of expression with accountability was recognized as critical to building trust in digital spaces.

Finally, the conference stressed that implementation must

begin within media houses themselves. Discrimination often starts in recruitment, training, and newsroom culture. Practical steps include designing gender policies by women, establishing gender officers and quotas, providing mentorship and leadership training, and embedding gender sensitivity into licensing and programming criteria. Evidence-based advocacy, grassroots engagement, and regional focal points were highlighted as effective strategies to amplify women's voices and ensure that policies translate into lived realities.





Leslie Richer- Director  
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(Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and Access to  
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Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Development Cooperation- Embassy of Sweden.





# AWiM2030 STRATEGIC VISION

Ten years in the making



See plan here

Thanks to all AWiM25 partners



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