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Women@Web Activity Reporting

STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT FORUM

Nairobi | Kenya
Jan 2020 - Mar 2020
Heron Portico, Nairobi
Siasa Place
February 25th 2020



Project Data

Project	Women@Web
Period	January 2020 - March 2020
Venue	Nairobi, Kenya
Cooperation partners	AMWIK, KICTANET
Project team	Nerima Wako - Ojiwa Programme Support and Trainer Miriam Obara Programme Support Waithera Mwangi Finance Support

Background

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2018, Siasa Place in partnership with DW Akademie's Women@Web project initiated the first digital safety clinic. It is a 3-year initiative covering Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania. The combination of Women@Web partners allowed the program to receive feedback from over 200 attendees in the East Africa region through research conducted after various workshops within the region.

The research observed that 6 out of 10 women have had personal experience with harassment and insults on the internet. 94% strongly believe that women are particularly vulnerable online and about 9 out of 10 participants therefore believe that women need digital training more than men do. Almost 8 out of 10 women say that they sometimes don't have the courage to defend themselves, especially when they hear what happens to other women who stood up for themselves.

In the case of Kenya, which has also embodied the masculine model of politics, the inequalities between both the male and female genders are mostly related to political structures that discriminate based on gender. Women active in politics or female political aspirants continue to be challenged by the lack of implementation of gender quotas, despite its stipulation in the constitution under Articles 27 (8) and 81 (b). The missing voices of Kenyan female voices at national level, therefore, trickles down to the county and grassroots levels.

Feedback from the first forum identified the need to involve women policy makers because of their experience that can help in identifying what steps needed to be taken to put safeguard in online space for women. The hashtag (**#WomenAtWebKE**) of the meeting trended at number 8 in the country for about two hours eventually diverse voices joined the conversation as annexed in (**See Annex 1**).

INTRODUCTION

Siasa Place held a breakfast forum on 25 February, 2020 at Heron portico, Nairobi. The purpose of the forum was to evaluate gaps in the policy and legal frameworks, if any, on safe women engagement in digital platforms and help recommend both legislative and judicial redress mechanisms respectively. With the assistance of our partner KICTANET, they were able to present their policy brief on, "The Underlying Causes of Gender Gaps on Online Content Creation". This engagement sought to provide a platform for deliberating on the key issue of Women's online participation.

Women@Web

Empowering women
in online spaces



Description of target group:

The meeting was attended by 21 out of the expected 25 participants representing different organizations. There were 19 women and 3 men present mostly from Nairobi county. One participant is based in Nakuru county.

Evaluation of the target group:

The participants included Hon. Martha Karua, NARC-Kenya Party leader, constitutional lawyer and former justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, Akili Dada - organization mentoring high school girls, Badili Africa - working towards improving women in political space, FEMNET - promoting human right among women in Africa, Kenya Law Reform, PAWA 254, Tribeless Youth, Journalists, Digital Influencers, Activists and Advocates.

Activity process:

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY NERIMA WAKO – OJIWA (ED,SP)

Nerima started by explaining that the convening was because of the issues affecting women online. For instance, if a woman is harassed, experience domestic abuse and are abused offline do they carry it to the online space?

Borrowing from the experience of a digital safety clinic held a week before which implemented a recommendation to include a session on therapy from the 2018 realized that women were able to give feedback, share their experience while some were traumatized online without realizing.

She proceeded to question how the future would look like when research shows that only 7% of women are in technology. 24 out of 500 companies are run by women while the majority of the smartphones they have access to are owned by their husband. How does that affect the digitization of women and is there going to be a gap, or a divide online when we are seeing that divide offline?

She concluded by noting that women who used to be vocal online chose to become tortoise once (hiding in their shell)they experience online harassment and hence the question is how to

make the online space safer for women to be themselves? She challenged the participants to think about the following questions as they engage during the meeting:

- Are we talking about an online space that is safe and accessible for women?
- What are we doing to prepare women to be able to take advantage of this space?
- What are we doing for women to prepare them for a future?

POLICY BRIEF PRESENTATION BY LIZ OREMBO

Liz Orembo is a KICTANeT associate, specialising in tech public policy analysis and advocacy.

She began by stating how women's ability to benefit from the internet is constrained by several underlying factors and such disparities intensifies gender-specific challenges. She stated that this policy brief illustrates the elements and issues at play affecting women's participation in information flow.

The main agenda of the policy brief was to highlight why women are not participating online and advocate for this policy brief once completed in two years with validation and feedback from women in different fields. They tried to classify the feedback from women into three main aspects which are; Social, Economic and Education.

She emphasized that the norms that govern women offline are the same norm that should govern them online. The way they are expected to behave offline is the same way they are expected to behave online. However, the following were observed with **social norms**:

- Women have closed up spaces for different subjects. For instance, most women will have different personalities on different social media platforms. A woman's profile on Instagram isn't the same on Facebook or LinkedIn because the internet space doesn't allow them to be the same person. This is due the fact that women keep on changing their character unlike men who will post about any subject or topic on any platform. For women, the spaces close them up to be what they are expected to do
- Male gaze: Most of the time when you navigate online, google displays the adverts suited for male viewing such that you will find that in some cases women are objectified.
- Media: How does the media portray women? Whenever you find a woman trending, it's for the wrong reason where the media capitalizes on this unwanted attention. It's as though the media wants women to compete and look a certain kind of way.
- Women are not expected to talk about their expertise. Especially areas that are perceived to be male dominated. An example was when Ms. Carol Radull the radio presenter was posting about football predictions where she used to be attacked by men online especially when her predictions were wrong and on the other end of the spectrum, her female perspective would come where they expected her to be at home cooking instead of giving football game predictions. There are double standards placed for women and how they should conduct themselves.

The following were observed on **economic aspects**

- When women go online, they need a network to subscribe to and a device. Women tend to earn less and their priorities are different maybe because;
- Some women don't find the internet environment relevant to them?
- The function of them earning less
- They are expected to allocate their budget towards the basic necessities such that by the time they want to purchase anything online, they can't afford it.

The following were observed on **education**

- Most women who contribute or create content online are university graduates with exception of a few cases. For instance a case shared from Kilifi of a woman who does a lot of work around women injustice in spite of her education background. Effort by the government through reduction of entry points for girls and readmission of girls who give birth was also noted to have contributed towards raising the level of women awareness. This was after it was noted that women were dropping out of class 8 to get married.

However, there was a challenge in trying to connect education with women's ability to create content online and the validation meeting helped to give a clearer picture on some aspects affecting women's participation online. For instance, technology being developed on smart-phones are for men. An example is the default apps that come with any standard smartphone phone. Some women gave feedback wanting some default applications on devices to be specific for women.

She concluded her presentation by asking the participants for feedback on what their thoughts were towards this policy brief with these questions in mind:

- What woman are we talking about?
- What would we want this woman to look like?
- What content would she be producing? Is she an activist, journalist, or is she trying to make money from her content?
- What are the different kinds of content producers would look like?



PLENARY REMARKS:

OPENING REMARKS FROM HON. MARTHA KARUA

Hon. Karua began by relating how offline activities find their way online, however there are double standards where if women post anything that is in conflict with men's expectations then they are turned into punching bags, which is not the same reaction with men.

She observed that the society was patriarchal to the extent women were expected to moderate their online comments when men were free. If for instance a woman expressed interest to contest governorship then she would be asked if she is sure but men can go for presidency without question. She therefore recommended the need for women to increase their presence online while safeguarding the same space.

She further noted that sometimes women were being made to bear burden of their male colleagues, which should not be the case and instead urged women to only guard their space online. If they find some people irritating then they had the right to block them

Hon. Karua concluded her remarks by taking pride in noting that her twitter account was among the first accounts to be verified in the country and also handles her twitter account personally. She plans to continue using her online space on twitter and is thinking of starting a youtube and instagram account.

PLENARY

Q1. What are some of the things you experienced online and was there any redress for you? Or any help you received online?

Mildred Ngesa, from FEMNET drew from the experience of a USA radio host who committed suicide due to cyber-bullying. She encouraged participants to be courageous to fight both online and offline just like others have done. She gave examples of Shikoh Kihika and Jerotich Seii who are influencers online despite the hurdle of faceless people they tackle online. She also shared about '**Decolonizing the internet**' an initiative of FEMNET where they highlight the stories of women in Africa that are not heard.

In her view, the internet disregards HERstory and talks more about HIStory leading to the question where is HERstory? That is the justification of patriarchy on the internet. She therefore recommended the need for women to reclaim their internet space, not to apologize for being women and encouraged the need for more meetings to heighten women's sensitivity to patriarchy.

Ondiro Oganga, a news anchor with Metropol TV observed the progress in that when she was starting very few women were in the space. However after having been introduced to other women doing great work, more women have since joined the space. She however noted that women in the media are not coming out strongly to give direction though a few like Jerotich Seii going on the TV show called 'Inside Politics' have exhibited a good character worth emulating and more need to come up.

Because not everyone will get space in mainstream media, she urged the use of social media, which is less restricted and can easily be accessed by majority

Q2. How do we safeguard the online space for women?

Jerotich Seii, an energy justice activist acknowledged the importance of mentorship in shaping an individual and challenges presented by employment because one has to protect the corporate identity making it difficult because they have to juggle between pleasing the employer to earn salary and be active online to voice challenges facing humanity.

She also noted that to have a great online presence, one needed to be disciplined, strategic and focused. Having people keep repeating the same message like she did with the campaign dubbed **#SwitchOffKPLC**

She therefore encouraged the participants that if they identify issues like corruption in any sector to pick them up because failure may break the country. Stella Nderitu from ActionAid however encouraged women to share their stories without fear because other women could learn through their stories

Bina Maseno from Badili Africa on the other hand urged women to build self-confidence and embrace diversity because young women are struggling to spend resources to look beautiful based on internet standards like being skinny and curvy. She urged the older women to support the upcoming women and mentor them to understand the narrative of beauty

Shikoh Kihika from Tribeless Youth encouraged women to learn how to give feedback, report cases of online harassment and block when need be.

Q3. What are some of the legal redresses we can use to get help on these online issues?

Rachel Ombaka observed that women fear sharing their experience because they fear victimization. Drawing from her past experience on a campaign on sexual harassment where women applauded the work she was doing but never contributed online

Joseph Mugo, an Advocate, said that creating policy was the way forward. He emphasized that a well-drafted policy would open up the space to align the existing challenges into the policies, which then inform the kind of laws to be formulated.

Q4. What does a safe digital space look like for women?

While responding, Hon. Martha Karua indicated that legislation was not the only solution as no successful persecution had been witnessed before and instead she urged women to support each other including to the extent of creating communication alert to notify in case of an incident. On the other hand, Wilkister Aduma, encouraged women to focus on issues since all were equal before the law and had equal benefit of the law.

Q5. What does digital security look like for women?

It was indicated that digital security would improve if more women were creating online content. However, organizations like AMWIK have initiated rapid response to online harassment. The women were also urged to use the online space to mobilize the middle class for particular causes because it was tricky to occupy space when women are polarized online.

Observations

The meeting observed the following:

1. Learning the history of women's movements in Africa is important to building a foundation for online activism.
2. There is need for a network of women to support each other
3. **Objectivity** is key to provide a secure environment for women
4. Policy is the first step towards pushing for a better legal framework.
5. There is a need to address the specific fears that women face which prevent them from participating online such as the psycho social impacts of online harassment.

Recommendations

1. There is a need to push for more women representation in leadership positions in order to influence the legal framework affecting women's online participation.
2. There is need for active participation by women can help in safeguarding online policies
3. Women need mentorship in their earlier days of activism in order to learn some ways of building confidence in the online space.
4. Support through training and workshops on trends and techniques on how to safeguard online spaces.

Impact

The participants felt that the forum opened up the conversation on how we could use policy mechanisms to tackle the issues on women's online harassment. They in turn gave their suggestions on how we can increase women's participation online.

Space for Improvement:

- More funding to reach out to a diverse demographic e.g. Women in rural Areas, PWD's to get them more involved in the conversation

Summary evaluation of the activity results:

The overall objective for the forum was met where we were able to educate and mobilize women policy makers towards advocating for a policy framework on addressing technology assisted violence. It opened up the dialogue for what can be done to improve women's safety online and increase their participation in important discourse.

Conclusions for future activities:

- There is need for more dialogues with a broader spectrum e.g. involving women in the rural areas
- With the finalized policy brief, another follow-up forum can be held with the same influential women to push for the implementation of the policy brief.

ANNEX 1:

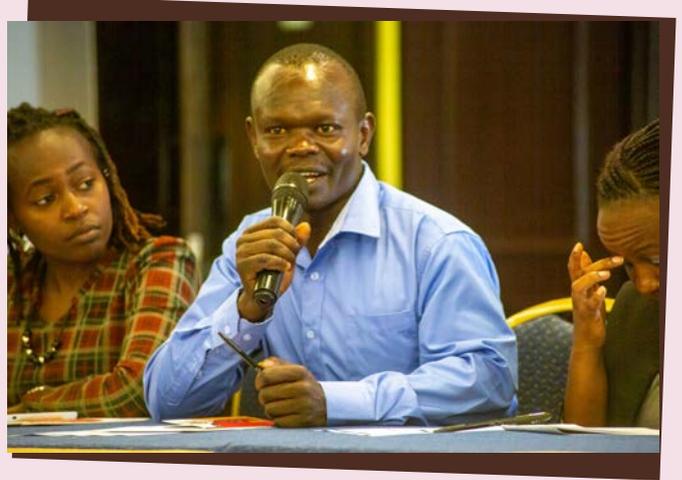
Link to pictures taken during the Activity:

<https://bit.ly/2RopSXY>

Trend Activity on twitter:



Gallery





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