



BASELINE REPORT

WOMEN'S
RIGHTS
ONLINE
ISSUES IN GHANA

WITH FUNDING SUPPORT FROM:



WORLD WIDE WEB
FOUNDATION

**BASELINE REPORT ON
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ONLINE
ISSUES IN GHANA**

DECEMBER, 2017



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Executive Summary

Gender inequality in Ghana is a pervasive issue which has drawn considerable attention among certain sections of the country's leadership, human rights activists, feminists, academics, media and other well-meaning Ghanaians who have the interests of under-represented groups (mostly women) at heart. Efforts to close gendered gaps in Ghana have traditionally rested on public education intended to highlight the need to give women equal or similar opportunities as men. Although these efforts are being made, there are still challenges due to the existence of some cultural and social beliefs and practices, high levels of illiteracy among the populace and a general unawareness about gendered inequality issues.

Although the internet has the potential to bridge the gap, it is still a hugely unexplored terrain for many Ghanaian women because of issues of access, affordability and knowhow. Moreover, the few women who actually have access are at risk of harassment as their rights online are not guaranteed especially in instances where they experience the same patriarchal and misogynistic attacks they encounter offline. The result is that many women are denied the opportunity to fully access and use the internet for economic gains and self-development. It is in this context that the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) embarked on a baseline study to assess issues surrounding women's rights online in Ghana. The study sampled and interviewed women,

women's rights groups and government Ministries and Agencies on a range of issues concerning women's access to and use of the internet, and policy interventions intended to protect the rights of women online and ongoing advocacy among women's groups and organisations.

The study found that among women, access to and use of the internet is highly dependent on the type of mobile device used and on level of education. Connecting with friends and family, entertainment and education emerged as the main reasons why the female respondents used the internet.

Unreliable yet expensive internet or data services; inadequate technical

know-how on internet use and online insecurity were some of the challenges the women reported were hampering their access and use of the internet.

Unfortunately two of the government Ministries and Agencies interviewed did not have much information to share about

Key Recommendations

- **Existing data prices should be reviewed downwards**
- **Public education and awareness creation efforts especially among women and girls should be intensified**
- **Existing policies should be updated with targets and budget allocations to facilitate implementation and monitoring**
- **More research should be done to provide scientific evidence to inform policies, interventions and advocacy to help improve the women's rights online situation in the country**

ongoing interventions specifically intended to boost women's access and use of the internet.

On the basis of the findings, it is recommended that existing data prices are reviewed; public education and awareness creation efforts especially among women and girls are intensified; existing policies are updated with targets and budget allocations to facilitate implementation and monitoring; and more research done to provide scientific evidence to inform policies, interventions and advocacy to help improve the women's rights online situation in the country.

1.0 Introduction

Ghana has in recent years been celebrated for achieving a number of development milestones. The country has witnessed among others, rapid economic growth and expansion, enjoyed good governance within the climate of multiparty political systems, been committed to democracy and the rule of law, witnessed the growth of a pluralistic media environment as well as a formidable civil society activism front. These have earned the nation worldwide praise and recognition for developmental efforts.

Despite these achievements, there are still deep-seated inequalities among segments of the population particularly between male and female populations. The gendered dimensions of inequality in the Ghanaian society cut across economic development, education, access to healthcare, vulnerability to violence and even political representation (Osei-Assibey, 2014). These inequalities are fueled by some cultural and social practices, high levels of illiteracy and general lack of awareness among the citizenry. Gendered inequality creates an unhealthy situation where most women and girls feel unnecessarily insignificant and end up as passive observers in the society while men unfortunately tend to have a feeling of superiority and dominate the women in their lives. In a country where the female population is more than half (about 51.2%) of the total population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014), these realities are highly retrogressive and promote an

imbalanced society which is detrimental for holistic development.

So far, attempts at bridging this unequal gap have centered around public education and the education of girls. One powerful tool that has the potential to reverse this trend and create an equally enabling environment for both genders is the internet. Unfortunately, since the online world is a reflection of offline realities, the same offline patriarchal and misogynistic tendencies are being experienced online. This is denying many women access to the opportunities that the internet offers for self-development, economic empowerment, civic and political participation. According to a study conducted in poor, urban communities in 9 cities across the global South, “women are 50% less likely than men to be online and 30-50% less likely to use the internet for economic and political empowerment” (World Wide Web Foundation, 2016).

A wide range of factors hinder women from being online and these include challenges with access, affordability, high levels of illiteracy and lack of knowhow, and online safety challenges (cyber bullying, harassment, cyberstalking, body shaming, rape threats and revenge pornography).[1] Even though government has put in place some ICT-related policies aimed at improving internet accessibility and use, and creating a safer internet space for the public, including women, many of them do not have clear targets or specific action plans or budget allocations for their effective implementation. For example,

the Information Communication Technology for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD), the National ICT and the National Gender Policies all do not have clearly defined targets which make it difficult to track progress in improving women's access to ICTs and in bridging the gender digital gap. Beside these policies, it is a bit unclear what specific measures government plans to put in place to improve women's access and use of the internet.

The situation is further compounded by the fact that only few civil society organisations are engaged on the issue of women's rights online. Quite a number of women's rights groups and organisations in the country appear to have little knowledge about women's rights online advocacy and because of that there is very limited advocacy on the issue from them. What is also not clear from these women's organisations are the interventions they are implementing or putting in place to ensure that women's rights online issues are prioritised in the country. It is in the context of the above that the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) carried out this baseline study to investigate prevailing issues surrounding women's right online in Ghana.

2.0 Objectives

The baseline study was undertaken to ascertain the following specific objectives:

- To map out practices and prevailing issues that impact women's rights online in Ghana

- To assess interventions by government and women's organisations to advance women's rights online in the country
- To make recommendations on the way forward for improving women's rights online in Ghana

3.0 Methodology

A mixed approach was used to gather relevant data from respondents to help achieve the objectives of the study. Specifically, a survey and in-depth interviews were used to ensure that as much relevant data as possible could be captured from all stakeholder groups. The quantitative methods allowed for numerical data to be collected to determine how widespread the issues played out among respondents while the qualitative data allowed for the issues to be explored in depth in order to get a complete picture of women's rights issues online.

For the survey, the cluster sampling technique was used to select 60 female respondents from three clusters (students, formal and informal sectors) in Accra. From the formal sector, respondents included women in financial institutions, government institutions, hospitals, and media organisations. The informal sector included head potters, market women, seamstresses, hairdressers, food vendors and shop attendants. Students were selected from both private and public tertiary

institutions.

A questionnaire was used to extrapolate quantitative responses from the 60 female respondents. Using interview guides, in-depth interview sessions were held with five ladies/women, five women's rights organisations, two government ministries and one government agency. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically.

4.0 Findings

This section contains findings from both the survey and the interviews. It details summaries of the survey responses as well as outcomes from the in-depth interviews which were held.

4.1 Demographics of survey respondents

Table 1 shows the distribution of the demographic information of survey respondents in terms of age, education level and marital status. Majority of the survey respondents were between 18 to 40 years. With the exception of six, all other respondents had some level of formal education (from primary to secondary). Most of them were either married or single. Only two people were widowed and six people divorced.

Table 1: Summary of demographic information of survey respondents

Age	Frequency	Education	Frequency	Marital Status	Frequency
18-25	19	No formal education	6	Married	21
26-30	13				
31-40	14	Primary	12	Single	31
41-45	6	Junior High School	3	Widow	2
46-50	4	Senior High School	4	Divorced	6
Above 50	4	Tertiary	35		
Total	60	Total	60	Total	60

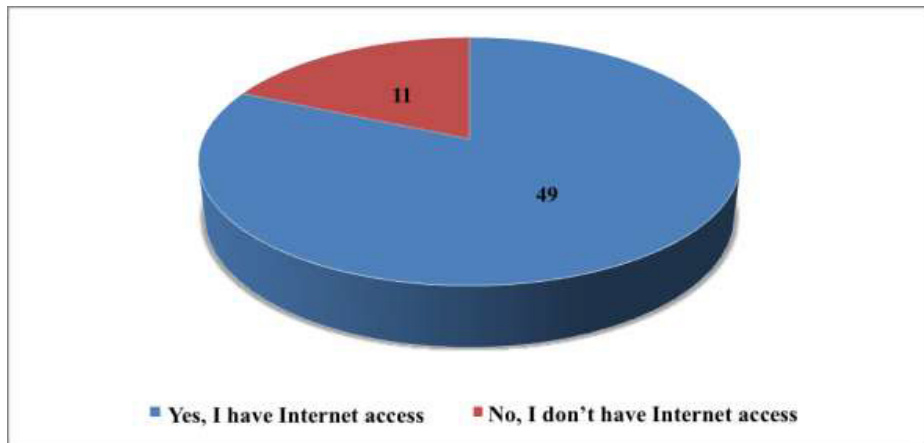
Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

4.2 Internet Access

In terms of internet access, it was found that women's ability to access the internet was largely linked to the type of mobile phone device they used. For instance, Figure 1 below shows that although all the 60 respondents reported owning mobile phones, eleven of them did not have internet access because their mobile phones did not support internet services. The remaining 49 respondents had mobile phones which supported internet services and so had internet access in terms of being

able to go online and use internet applications and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and web browsers.

Figure 1: Internet Access



Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

It was also found that the level of education greatly determined whether women had internet access or not. As shown in Table 2 below, women who had tertiary education tended to have higher access and usage of internet services (60%).

Table 2: Level of Education and Internet Access

Education	Do you have access to/use the internet		
	Yes	No	Total
Tertiary	35	0	35
SHS	4	0	4
JHS	3	0	3
Primary	6	6	12
No formal education	1	5	6
Total	49	11	60

Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

The study found that age was an important determinant of internet access and use. Table 3 below, for instance, shows that younger women (respondents) between the ages 18-30 (53%) were more likely to have access to the internet than older women. This was followed by women between 31-40 years (23%) who also were likely to have access and utilised internet services.

Table 3: Age and Internet Access

Age	Internet access		
	Yes	No	Total
18-25	19	0	19
26-30	13	0	13
31-40	10	4	14
41-45	3	3	6
46-50	1	3	4
Above 50	3	1	4
Total	49	11	60

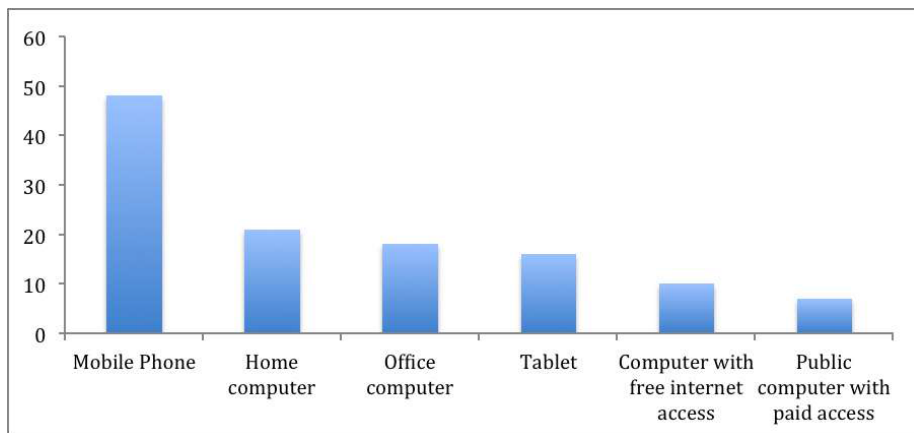
Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

4.3 How Women Access the Internet

The respondents who had internet access reported six devices through which they usually accessed the internet. These were mobile phones, tablets, home and office computers, public computers with free internet access and public computers with paid access. Of the six devices, mobile phones were found to be major devices women used to access the internet. Specifically, almost all the respondents (48) reported using mobile phones to access the internet. A significant number of respondents (21) also reported using home and office computers, and

tablets to access the internet. Figure 2 below shows the number of respondents who reported using the six devices to access the internet.

Figure 2: Devices Used for Internet Access



Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

4.4 Frequency of Internet Use

In terms of the frequency of use of the six devices in accessing the internet, 44 respondents reported using their mobile phones every day to access the internet while 10 respondents each indicated using their home computers and office computers every day. Also four out of the 16 tablet users indicated using their tablets to access the internet every day. The results also showed that respondents hardly used public computers regardless of whether they had to pay to use or had free access. Table 4 below provides more details on these findings.

Table 4: Type of Devices and Frequency of Use for Internet Access

Frequency of Device Use	Mobile Phone	Home Computer	Office Computer	Tablet	Public Computer - free WiFi	Public Computer - paid access
7 days a week	44	10	10	4	2	0
4-6 days a week	3	0	4	3	2	0
2-3 days a week	0	6	2	5	3	2
Once a week	1	5	2	4	3	4
Just once	0	0	0	0	0	1
Never	0	28	29	30	35	39
Total	48	49	47	46	45	46

Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

4.5 Reasons Why Women Use the Internet

The most frequently cited reason for using the internet among respondents was to enable them stay connected with family, friends and acquaintances. A respondent from the in-depth interview had this to say: “I speak with my sister abroad on Viber... aside making online calls, I hardly do anything else on the internet.” Another lady reported: “I make video calls

on WhatsApp and Imo especially to keep in touch with some friends outside the country.”

Other reasons cited for using the internet included entertainment, education, fashion and income generating activities respectively. In terms of using the internet for entertainment and information purposes, one respondent said: “to check for new songs or videos and sometimes to check on trending celebrities just to know what’s up and to make sure that me too when they are talking I can say some.”

For those who indicated using the internet for income generating purposes, some explained that they used the internet to scout for new designs they could create for their clients. This is what a respondent had to say: “I go online to read and check for trending hairstyles so I can do some for my clients. Others indicated that they used the internet to search for job vacancies and to apply for jobs.”

Others reported using the internet as part of performing their daily work routines. For respondents who reported using the internet for educational purposes, most of them mentioned research as the main reason why they used the internet. The least cited reason for use of the internet among respondents was “For parenting” (using the internet to get information and tips about parenting).

Reasons Why Women Use the Internet

- Stay connected with family, friends and acquaintances
- Entertainment
- Education
- Fashion
- Income generating activities

All the reasons cited for accessing and using the internet are listed in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Reasons for Using the Internet

Reasons for Internet Use	Frequency
To stay connected	45
Entertainment	41
For educational purposes	31
Fashion	26
For income generating activities	23
To debate issues	19
Religious purposes	18
To make friends	17
To pass time	14
For parenting	7

Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

4.6 Challenges Affecting Women’s Access and Use of the Internet

The baseline study recorded six variables that all the respondents identified as challenges to their use of the internet.

The challenges reflected the views of both respondents who used the internet and those who did not. Among those who had access to the internet, the challenges they encountered with internet access and use included unreliable internet services and high internet costs. These were reported as hampering their frequent use of the internet. One respondent, for instance shared her frustration: “... sometimes you try to load pages and they keep bouncing, it doesn’t load and this makes it frustrating for getting information or whatever you want to use the internet for.”

Challenges Affecting Women’s Access and Use of the Internet

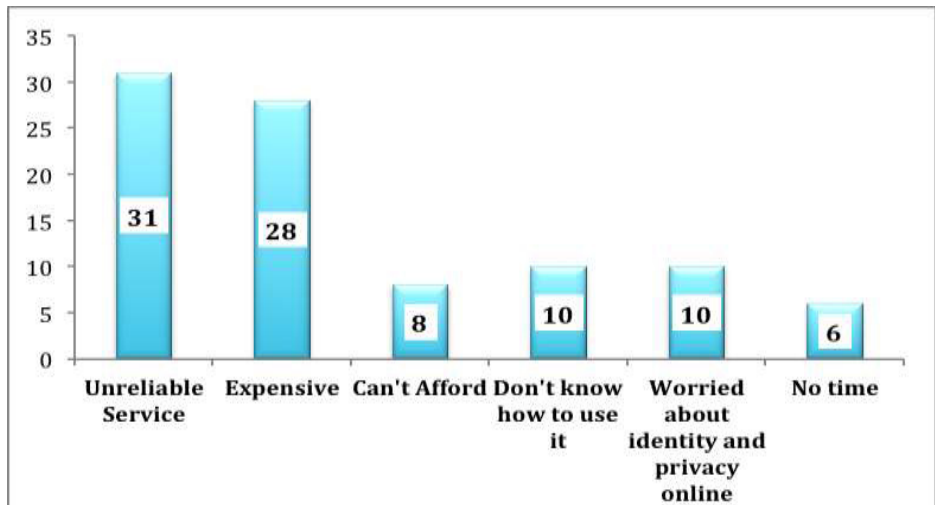
- Unreliable internet service
- High internet or data costs
- Lack of technical Know-how
- Online safety and security

Cost also emerged as a significant factor that affects respondents frequent use of the internet. As shown in Figure 3 below, expensive data was the second most cited challenge inhibiting frequent internet use among respondents with internet access. Those who responded that data was expensive even though they could afford, thought the cost was high and this affected the frequency at which they bought and used internet data. For instance, one interviewee said, “cost of using the internet is sometimes high.” Closely related to the expensive cost was the number of respondents who reported their inability to afford internet charges – such people could not buy or pay for internet services.

It is also notable that quite a number of respondents

indicated that even though they had internet access, they had challenges with its use either because they did not know how to use the internet-based applications on their mobile phones or were concerned/worried about their identity and privacy online. This was expressed in comments by interviewees such as “I do not have much knowledge on the applications and so I hardly use any of them.” Another person commented: “I see that there is no privacy with these mobile applications in the sense that a little mistake, then is gone viral and it actually demotivates some of us to use them.”

Figure 3: Factors Affecting Frequent Internet Access and Use



Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

Among the respondents who did not use the internet, there was every indication that they knew that the internet is a valuable source of information which can empower them and improve their standards of doing business and living. However, they

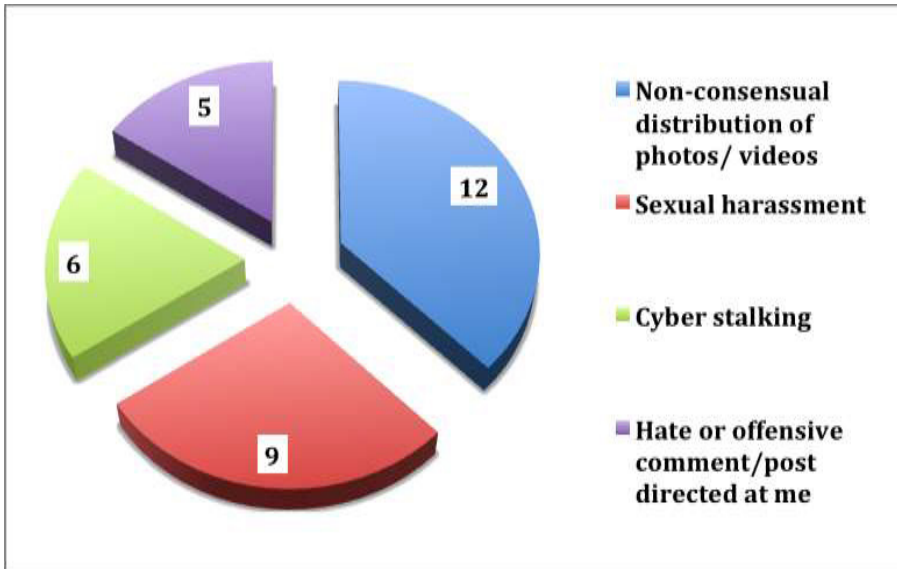
were confronted with a major challenge of not having access to an internet connected device or being knowledgeable about how to access and use the internet. This is what a respondent had to say: “...there is up-to-date information on everything on the net, but I don’t own a smartphone and I don’t know how to use a computer either... [more women will be online] “if they knew their way around the tools and could buy the phones.”

Issues about online security and online privacy also emerged as reason why some respondents refrained from using the internet. One interviewee said: “My fear is insecurity, in terms of your information going out. Maybe your account can be hacked and people can get your information or people can use your account to share or send information to your contacts or that people can spy on your online activities.”

4.7 Women’s Online Safety Challenges

Respondents were asked about online safety by exploring if they had encountered any form of harassment with their online experiences. Nineteen (39%) of those with internet access indicated that they had experienced different types of harassments ranging from non-consensual distribution of their pictures to cyber stalking as detailed in Figure 4 below:

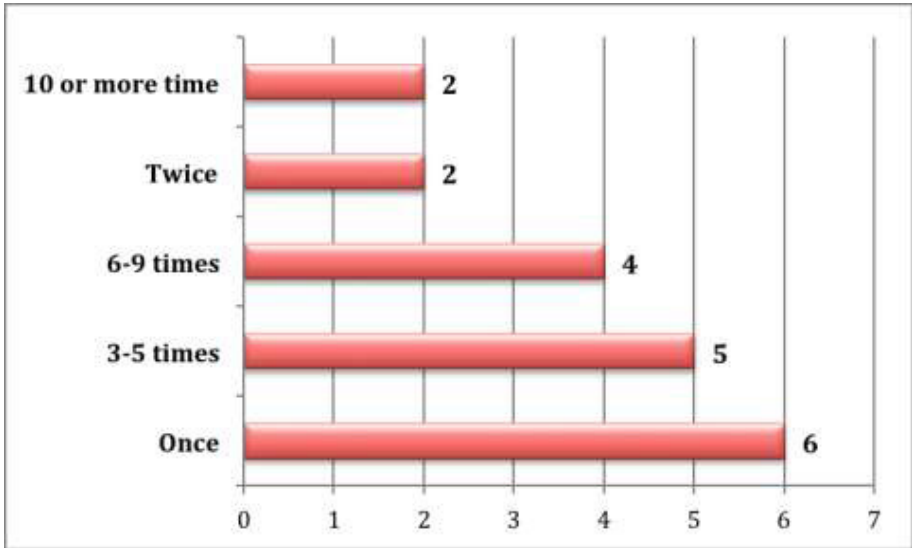
Figure 4: Types of Online Harassments Experienced by Respondents



Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

Unfortunately, for many of the respondents, the harassments mentioned above were not one-off experiences. Among the 19 respondents who reported experiencing online harassments about 68 percent reported experiencing harassment twice or more. The responses are presented in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Frequency of Harassment



Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

4.8 Actions taken following Online Harassments

Among the respondents who indicated that they had either been stalked, sexually or verbally attacked or had their photos wrongfully distributed, some of them indicated having taken steps to further protect themselves online. A few others did not take any such precaution. Generally, it appeared most victims of the online abuses did not see the need to report their abusers. The few who did chose to confide in family members or friends who in turn did nothing about the abuses. Strangely, none of the respondents reported any of the harassment cases to law enforcement agents

(police). In Table 6, the specific actions the affected respondents took after their online harassment experiences is presented

Table 6: Actions taken following online harassment

Action taken after online harassment	Frequency
Blocked perpetrators	11
More careful about online activities	7
Confronted the perpetrators	5
Changed email address/account details	3
Did nothing	3
Reported to family/friend	2
Tried to educate others about online safety issues	1
Stopped using the internet	1
Used a pseudonym to remain anonymous	0
Reported to the police	0

Source: MFWA Field Data, 2017

4.9 Knowledge Levels about Women's Rights Online Issues in Ghana

One of the objectives of the study was to ascertain knowledge levels about women's rights online by finding out through

interviews from women's groups if they were aware of women's right online issues and what measures they had in place to promote the rights of women online. Five women's groups or organisations were interviewed. The core mandate of all the five organisations interviewed centered around advocating issues about women's economic empowerment, access to justice and healthcare, participation in decision-making and gender discrimination. Advocacy, according to all of them, was usually done offline through seminars, workshops and media engagements. Some of the women's groups interviewed organised durbars as a way of advocacy and awareness creation in communities. This is what one had to say, "Most of the advocacy is done through the organisation of seminars, workshops and the publication of policy briefs to create awareness and understanding on gender issues especially in the media."

Knowledge Levels about Women's Rights Online Issues in Ghana

- There is a general dearth in knowledge about women's rights online issues among the women's group interviewed.
- None of the women's organisations interviewed directly focused on women's right online issues as part of their work.

All the women's groups interviewed accessed and used the internet for their work on a daily basis. Sending correspondence, disseminating information, updating websites and researching on issues were the main activities such women's groups used the internet for. With the exception of

one women's organisation, all others had well-functioning websites which were updated with content as and when it was generated. Similarly, all but one had social media accounts which were used to disseminate information on gender and women's issues, respond to questions and update people on the activities of the organisation. The Ark Foundation for instance reported, "Our website and social media accounts are used to share our work and experiences of injustices to women. Additionally, it is used as a medium to mobilise attention to women's rights issues."

Interestingly, none of the women's organisations interviewed focused on women's right online issues as part of their work. However, two organisations were aware of the women's rights online issues and made mention of some women's rights online campaigns they knew of such as "Bring back our girls campaign," "End FGM," "End child marriage campaign," and "Say no to violence against women and girls." Also, all the women's organisations displayed a lack of awareness of any legal or regulatory framework in the country that specifically protects women's rights online. One organisation mentioned the Domestic Violence Act as an instrument that can be used to protect the rights of women online, but was not clear what the act says on issues related to women's rights online.

Responses from these women's groups suggest that quite a number of them do not have much knowledge about women's rights online issues. As a result, their activities, engagements and advocacy tend to focus dominantly on

offline women's rights issues to the neglect of the need to safeguard online rights issues as well. Also, the women's organisations are themselves not optimising the power of the internet to improve their advocacy in order to improve their impact and fundraising prospects. These limitations are greatly impacting women's rights advocacy both offline and online in Ghana.

4.10 Interventions by Government to Advance the Rights of Women Online

Ensuring a safe online environment should be accompanied by enabling policies. Thus, the study also sought to find out from some government institutions who principally deal with women issues as well as issues relating to information, communication and technology (ICT) interventions that have been put in place to protecting the rights of women online. Specifically, officials from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), the National Communication Authority (NCA) and the Ministry of Communication were interviewed to ascertain measures which have been implemented.

In terms of access to the internet, respondents from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) and the Ministry of Communication acknowledged gender inequality, stressing that women occupy a disadvantaged position compared to men in this regard, "Relatively fewer women (mostly the elite) access the internet as against men

and this has created a gender gap in the usage of ICT for socioeconomic development in Ghana.” Interestingly, the Ministry opined that even among women, access to the internet was heavily dependent on educational levels with the more educated women having more opportunity to access and use the internet, “...the government is of the view that women’s access to internet is low with educated women having the upper hand.” This observation corroborates findings of this study which show that education is a major determinant of women’s access to internet services. The Ministry reiterated government’s commitment to resolve the situation “Government is aware of the situation and is committed to putting resources in place.”

The NCA was, however, of the view that all other groups of people have internet access and so women’s access to the internet is not gendered. It instead opined that women are more vulnerable online than men, “women like any other group of persons have access to the internet. However, women just like children are at a greater risk and are more vulnerable on the internet.”

Given that the survey found that women believe internet costs are expensive and unaffordable, the governmental bodies were asked to share the interventions they had implemented to create more opportunities for girls and women to access and afford the internet. With the exception of the Ministry of Communications, the actors could not make mention of any specific intervention launched to foster women’s access to

affordable internet.

According to the Ministry of Communications, government had began a “national broadband infrastructure expansion project” to increase access and reduce internet cost and also instituted a “girls in ICT initiative” to expose more girls to opportunities inherent in ICT and encourage them to study ICT-related courses. Ghana has embarked on a national broadband and infrastructure expansion drive to increase access and also reduce broadband cost. This will in effect result in the reduction of internet cost and increase access for all online users. That is, men and women. Most women don’t go online because they lack knowledge to do so. Hence, government since 2017 has embarked on celebration of “Girls-in-ICT initiative” to expose girls to the opportunities in the ICT field and encourage them to embark on ICT courses.”

On the question of specific programmes and efforts being taken to safeguard the safety and privacy of women online, only the Ministry of Communications was able to name two policies intended to protect women online. “Government has developed a national cyber security policy to tackle threats and vulnerabilities encountered online... [and] established the Ghana Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) to monitor online incidences to ensure the safety and privacy of all online users (men and women alike),” the Ministry said.

From the above, there appears to be the absence of clear initiatives aimed at protecting women’s rights online. Rather, there are general programmes which have the

potential to address the challenges women face online. Again, the variances in the responses from the government agencies interviewed suggest a certain lack of coordination (among the ministries and other government agencies) or a possible gap in the flow of information. This has probably created a lack of uniform awareness about government interventions aimed at improving internet access, reducing internet costs and providing a safe internet environment for women in particular.

5.0 Conclusion

The protection of the rights of women and girls online is critical in ensuring greater use of the internet by this group for self-advancement and empowerment. This baseline study has shown that among women, access to and use of the internet is highly dependent on the type of mobile device they use and on their level of education. That means that more women need to be educated and equipped with digital skills if the country wants to have more of its women accessing and using the internet. The study also shows that the main reason women use the internet is for connecting with friends and family, entertainment and education. Unfortunately, the few who are able to access and use the internet encounter several challenges such as unreliable yet expensive internet or data services; lack of technical know-how on internet use and online safety challenges. These findings have implications for service providers, government, media, non-governmental

organisations, civil society organisations as well as academia.

6.0 Recommendations

This section highlights recommendations based on the findings of the study and suggests actors to implement the suggested recommendations.

6.1 Making Internet Accessible and Affordable

If more women are to have access to and use the internet, then efforts must be made to provide data services at affordable prices. The current situation is that 1GB of internet data costs over 7% of average monthly income (World Wide Web Foundation, 2016) (World Wide Web Foundation, 2016). Given that most women earn less than men (Osei-Assibey, 2014), the cost factor is a huge deterrent for women to use the internet. Government can, therefore, consider implementing tax exemptions on certain operations of internet service providers so they can translate those exemptions into providing lower internet prices. One finding of this study is that government is working at expanding internet coverage/connectivity in the country. This is commendable and government is urged to remain committed to ensuring that such projects are executed in the

shortest time possible and to rural areas where most of the country's women are engaged in farming and other activities.

The community information centres set up by government to expand ICT access particularly in rural areas are a potential to bridging the digital gender gap. However, most of such facilities are either under equipped, have faulty/non-functioning equipment or have no internet connectivity (World Wide Web Foundation , 2016). Measures should, therefore, be instituted by government to upgrade all such community information centres and ensure that they are well resourced (with equipment and qualified staff). These information centres can be used as community internet access points to ensure that those within rural areas (including women and girls) are exposed to affordable internet which they take advantage of for their self-improvement. Government can also use part of the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication (Ghana's USF) to set up more internet access points especially in rural areas.

6.2 Public Education

The study found that the reported cases of online abuses centred around harassment, hateful/offensive comments, cyber stalking and non-consensual distribution of photos. However, the respondents who reported cases of abuse to a large extent, failed to report such cases of abuse to security agencies. There were few instances where victims discussed

their ordeal with family and friends, but no instance of abuse being reported to the police service. Perhaps this could be as a result of a general sense of unawareness among women of what exactly constitutes cybercrime or the abuse of their rights online or the statutory agencies responsible for dealing with online harassment. This, therefore, calls for more public education from women's rights advocates, the police service and the media to create awareness among women. For example, such education by women's groups and the media could focus on defining or describing what it means for the rights of a woman to be violated online so that women would be in a position to identify and report to the appropriate quarters when they encounter abuses online. Personnel of the police service in general and the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit in particular also need to be educated/trained on what the laws/regulations say about women's rights online in order to be in a better position to prosecute any offenders.

6.3 Education of Women and Girls

A challenge reported among respondents to their use of the internet had to do with a lack of technical know-how or limited digital skills. This suggests a need for increased education to equip women and girls on how to use the internet to their advantage. For girls in school, the Ministry of Education has a responsibility to ensure that more opportunities are made available to them, especially those in

rural areas, to nurture their interest in ICTs. In this regard, government can form partnerships with private sector organisations to set up subsidised training schools with the aim of equipping more girls with knowledge about ICTs and internet use.

6.4 Implementation of Existing Policies

The study also revealed that some government institutions (concerned with women's rights online related issues) are aware of the gendered nature of internet access and use in Ghana. Yet, among the government agencies studied, it was evident that there was an absence of agreement in terms of the specific interventions government is undertaking to close the digital gap between men and women and protect women's rights online. Going forward, it is recommended that measures are put in place to ensure more coordination among government agencies so each one knows exactly what is being done by the other to help bridge the digital gender gap. In this regard, it is also recommended that frequent workshops are held among relevant stakeholders to facilitate knowledge sharing and the implementation of solutions to the situation at hand. In addition, policies which are not implemented are as good as being non-existent. Government Ministries and agencies should be more committed to implementing existing policies meant to utilise ICTs to reduce gender inequality. Specific gender targets should be set with budgetary allocations to help in implementation processes.

6.5 Research

The above recommendations suggest that public education, awareness creation and policy formulation and implementation are important aspects of promoting women's rights online issues. This can be achieved, however, with the backing of sound research from academia and other development research bodies. Hence, more attempts should be made by the faculty of academic institutions to produce knowledge which will inform measures to bridge the gender gap of internet access and use and safeguard women's privacy online.

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