



Safety of Women Journalists in Guinea-Bissau

Report



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Executive Summary

This Report on the Safety of Women Journalists explores threats and dangers to the safety of women journalists in Guinea-Bissau. Altogether, 19 people participated in the survey. They included media professionals with different functions, particularly journalists, reporters, union leaders and heads of print media groups.

The Report reveals that female presence in the media profession is far below expectations, as it is quite lower than that of men (80% as against 20%). Added to this are the cases of sexual harassment, both in newsrooms and in the field, and the limited or almost non-existent opportunities for professional development for women.

Some female journalists feel oppressed by their superiors. This situation undermines the latter, who are often afraid of being marginalised in the newsrooms. Additionally, most abused women journalists tend to be silent, especially when it comes to cases of sexual harassment, as such cases hardly get redressed even when reported, with the victims often mocked, rebuked and made to feel responsible for their ordeal. This attitude is born of the influence of culture and traditional values.

Beyond the offline violations, other journalists admitted to having already been the target of insults and threats on social networks because of their affiliation with a particular media.

Also noteworthy is a practice accepted by almost all ethnic groups in the country where women are not trained to face the labour market with determination, and men, on the other hand, are not educated to welcome the professional integration of women. Women are trained to be housewives and those who manage to stand out academically and professionally are targets of criticism once they go against the socio-cultural logic.

There is also a lack of knowledge about the different types of sexual harassment on the part of both men and, sometimes, the women themselves. This creates conditions conducive to the proliferation of this type of violation.

To find solutions to such ills undermining the safety of women journalists, investments have been recommended in specific areas. These include training and technical capacity building for women journalists with a focus on security, ethics, human rights, denunciation, and follow-up of cases of sexual harassment in the workplace as well as promoting gender equality and equity.

These recommendations were substantiated after considering the findings set out in the Report, which also underlines the strong will of women journalists to face all these obstacles that compromise their safety and professional emancipation.

Introduction

Women journalists and media practitioners in Guinea-Bissau often face specific attacks and threats that affect their safety. Their rights are often scorned, and the violations go unnoticed in most cases. This Report provides an overview of the results of a study on the safety of female journalists in Guinea-Bissau conducted by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA).

The study is intended to promote the empowerment of women in journalism while improving their safety online and offline through research, reporting, engagement, and making all the stakeholders involved in journalism aware of the challenges faced by female media professionals.

According to the Report, women journalists face several obstacles daily while discharging their duties, particularly sexual harassment (in newsrooms and in the field), male dominance in newsrooms and glass ceilings.

Male dominance in newsrooms and the lack of opportunities to occupy leadership positions in their workplaces are among the major challenges faced by female media professionals. Some women journalists feel oppressed and even threatened by their bosses daily in newsrooms, which causes them discomfort, or even makes them afraid of being sidelined.

As regards their online presence, some journalists admitted to having already been the target of insults and threats on social networks because of their affiliation with a particular media.

Most of the abused women journalists tend to be silent, especially when it comes to cases of sexual harassment. According to the Report, such response to abuses may be linked to the fact that past reports have not been adequately dealt with, with the victims rather suffering a social stigma. Some are discouraged from reporting steps have not been taken to identify the different situations of sexual harassment or even those linked to cultural issues.

However, despite the challenges faced by women journalists, it is noticed, on the one hand, that there is a desire to embrace the career with professionalism, and on the other hand, courage to face all these obstacles to their safety and, consequently, their professional emancipation.

A ray of hope, according to the Report, comes from the fact that most of the young girls practising journalism are trained in the field.

In conclusion, there is a need for technical training for women with a focus on their safety both in newsrooms and in the field, to enable them to face the challenges of the profession. It is also necessary to train women journalists in the management of online tools, digital rights, human rights, gender equality, ethics and professional conduct in the field of journalism.

Methodology

The study was prepared through a participatory approach that followed an inclusive process that involved listening to different media practitioners. It was based on the use of several methods of information gathering, particularly documentary analysis, focus groups and interviews with media professionals in Guinea-Bissau. The study rallied a total of 19 media practitioners, including 10 women professionals from public, private and community media, 4 media advocacy organisations and 5 media managers.

The methodological approach focused mainly on the problems affecting the professional activity of women journalists, such as:

- The level of knowledge and technical skills available to women professionals and the media to enable them to deal with obstacles related to sexual harassment;
- The critical view of women about threats and insecurity in the field;
- Strategies adopted by female media professionals to deal with job insecurity;
- The main obstacles to the emancipation of women in journalism;
- Factors that influence poverty in the press sector;
- To what extent, the organisations of the class act in the face of denunciations of sexual harassment of which women among the professionals of social communication are victims.

Brief overview of the Legal Framework for the Media

The Right to Information (Article 34) and Freedom of the Press (Article 56) are enshrined in the 1996 Constitution and Press Laws. Article 51 of the Constitution provides that "everyone has the right to express and disseminate his or her thoughts freely by any means at his or her disposal, as well as the right to inform, to be informed and to seek information without hindrance or discrimination".

Various laws govern the Media in Guinea-Bissau. They include:

- Law on the Print Media and News Agencies – No.1/2013;
- Law on Freedom of the Press – No. 2/2013;
- Television Law – No. 3/2013;
- Broadcasting Law – No. 4/2013;
- Statute for Journalists – No. 5/2013.
- Advertising Law – No. 6/2013;
- Law on the Right to Broadcasting and Political Broadcasts – No. 7/2013;
- Law on the National Communication Council - No. 8/2013;
- Basic Law on Information and Communication Technologies – Law No. 5/2010 of 27 May 2010.

Article 56 of the 1996 Constitution also stipulates the creation of a National Communication Council, an independent body whose composition and functioning shall be defined by law, to guarantee the provisions of the said Article and ensure respect for ideological pluralism.

Article 57 allows political parties to have airtime on radio and television. This provision has made it possible to see the emergence of several private initiatives through the creation of media companies, particularly in the field of radio stations and newspapers, which were subsequently complemented with initiatives that led to the proliferation of community radio stations.

In 2018, the Media and Communications Innovation Consortium (CMICS), of which the Journalists' Union (SINJOTECS) is a member, created in partnership with the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office (Uniobis), a package of Press Laws, including the Online Press. However, the said document has still not been discussed and/or approved by the Government, which also participated in the process through the Ministry of Communication.

I. Overview of the Safety of Journalist Environment

Over the past five years, Guinea-Bissau has experienced moments of turmoil. Journalists and media outlets have been victims of raids, physical assault and beatings, destruction of equipment as well as armed robberies, threats and intimidation. Therefore, an overview of the media landscape suggests an environment hostile to journalism, since no cases of press freedom violations or crimes committed against journalists and the media have been tried; in other words, there is manifest impunity for crimes committed against journalists.

Another factor to be taken into consideration is the vague legislations, which are applied by the authorities to hamper the work of the Media. Recently, the Government ordered the closure of more than 79 radio stations, arguing that they had not paid operating licence fees. The Government relied on an unfinished legislation - Law No. 4/2013 of June 25 on Broadcasting.

Paragraph 1 of Article 3 of the said Law stipulates that the broadcasting activity may be exercised by public, cooperative or private entities, in accordance with the current law, the applicable international standards and a licensing system defined by a licensing decree for the exercise of broadcasting, while safeguarding the rights already acquired by duly authorised operators. On the other hand, Point 2 determines that the exercise of the broadcasting activity, with the exception of the public service, requires a licence, which must be granted in accordance with the licensing regime that shall be defined by decree.

Apparently, when this political step was taken, the decree regulating the process of granting a broadcasting licence did not exist. In other words, the step taken was illegal, but it was

applied, and that measure had devastating effects for radio stations, most of which were forced to stop broadcasting until they paid the amounts required.

The biggest victim was Rádio Capital, which was unable to resume its broadcasts, because the Government, through the Ministry of Communication, alleged breaches of protocol related to the absence of information on the change of premises of the Radio, from Bairro Militar to Bairro Belém, and even requested the Radio to apply for a new licence for its operation, after having received and issued a receipt for the payment of the debts contracted by Rádio Capital to the tune of 1,000,000 CFA Francs.

The level of impunity for crimes committed against media professionals is very high because, in most or almost all the cases, the perpetrators were not identified by the authorities, who always claimed that these were isolated cases. Despite the scope of crimes against journalists, the Government did not deign to conduct investigations to identify and hold offenders accountable.

II. Issues and Challenges related to the Safety of Women Journalists (Online and Offline)

1. Representation of Women in the Media

According to an observation made at the Lusophone University of Guinea, the 4th Year Class of the 2022/23 Academic Year had 18 students, i.e., 17 girls and 1 boy. Many women are therefore obtaining university degrees in journalism. However, according to a survey conducted in May 2022 by the Women Journalists Association (Associação de Mulheres Profissionais de Comunicação Social, AMPROCS) in partnership with the Association for Cooperation Among Peoples (Associação para a Cooperação Entre Povos, ACEP) and financed by Camões Institute, men represent 80% of media practitioners, while women represent 20%.

In Guinea-Bissau, there are 12 private radio stations in operation. At the top hierarchy of these institutions, we have only three (3) women in leadership positions, as shown in Table 1 below. The participants in the study to produce this Report believe that the fact that the management of the media is dominated by men constitutes an obstacle to the professional growth of women in the media sector.

Table 1 below identifies the three women with leadership roles in private radio stations in Guinea-Bissau.

Table 1

No.	Name	Private Radio	Function
01	Margarida Correia	Radio Nossa	General Manager
02	Djariatu Baldé	Radio Jovem	Deputy Editor-in-Chief
03	Elisangela dos Santos	Radio Sol Mansi	News Director

At the management level, only one woman holds the position of General Manager. She is Margarida Correia of Radio Nossa, a broadcasting station owned by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Then there is Elisangela dos Santos, News Director at Radio Sol Mansi, which belongs to the Catholic Church. Finally, Djariatu Baldé is the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Radio Jovem, which belongs to the Network of Youth Associations of Guinea-Bissau.

Table 2 below illustrates the total dominance of men in the leadership of the four (4) public media organisations.

Table 2 – Leadership in Public Media Organisations

No.	Name	Public Media Organisations	Function
01	Amadou Djamana	Guinée-Bissau TV	Managing Director
02	Abduramane Djaló	Jornal Nô Pintcha	Managing Director
03	Mamasaliu Sane	Radio Nacional	Managing Director
04	Salvado Gomes	Guinea News Agency	Managing Director

As for the community radio and television stations, out of 40 radio stations and 4 television stations, only one is headed by a woman. It is Bafata Rádio Mulher because of its particularity. Women assume all the leadership positions, as only women work in this media group.

Table 3 – Leadership in Journalist Organisations

No.	Name	Organisation	Function
01	Indira Correia Baldé	SINJOTECS	President
02	Paula Melo	Association of Women Journalists	President
03	António Nhaga	Order of Journalists	« Bastonaire »
04	Pedro Vençam Gomes	National Community Radios Network	Coordinator

This table shows a gender balance in the leadership of organisations dedicated to defending the interests of journalists and promoting press freedom and freedom of expression.

2. Offences against the Safety of Women Journalists

Women journalists often face derogatory remarks that have nothing to do with their work or abilities and are victims of chauvinistic obsession with their looks and dressing. Their images are often splashed on social media including private WhatsApp group platforms and discussed in sexist terms. When a political party or politician feels offended by what has been written or broadcast by a female journalist, they unleash their troll army on the “offending” journalists. These paid militants would send several text messages and call into broadcast programmes to attack the credibility and the personality of their targets. They would flood social media with their smear campaign and even send messages and threats including threats of rape, directly to their targets.

For example, journalist Indira Correia Baldé of the Portuguese Radio and Television (Rádio e Televisão de Portugal) was the victim of insults on social media from supporters of pro-government political parties based in Guinea-Bissau, because they do not agree with the way she approaches political issues of the country. This is a systematic attack on her personal honour and her professionalism.

Another case is that of journalist Fátima Tchumá Camará of Rádio Difusão Nacional da Guiné-Bissau and correspondent of RDP-África. She has also been the victim of insults on social media by pro-government activists.

While smear campaigns can be targeted at male journalists too, they are gendered when the targets are women. It is often their looks, their private life and issues about their relationships. Sometimes, scurrilous stories about them being in relationships with some unnamed persons are created, amidst threats to reveal more, if the journalist persists in publishing or broadcasting the “hostile” information.

It is reported that upon coming into contact with female journalists in the course of work, some male officials assume having become friends with these journalists. They will call them,

even at odd hours and, sometimes, pester them with proposals. In some cases, they demand to go out with the female journalists.

Some men invite female journalists to receive in person information that could easily be given over the phone or by mail, as a pretext to strike acquaintance with, or make advances towards them. Some even schedule appointments with a journalist at their offices, only to inform the latter at the approach of the appointed time that they are at a different location and asking, sometimes persuading, the journalist to meet them at the said location.

“Often, these new locations are too informal for comfort. It is either an exclusive restaurant or coffee shop or the car park of a quiet public place. In fact, some are even bold enough to invite you to meet them in a hotel,” one respondent said.

Too many times, male interlocutors of female journalists bring up topics that are completely irrelevant.

“They are often prying into your private matters, asking whether you are married, have a boyfriend, fiancé or children. It is really upsetting, as we know that they don’t ask our male colleagues similar questions when they engage them,” another respondent said.

The harassment culture has been sustained largely by the absence of safety protocols and safeguarding policies within the media organisations. There are no established mechanisms for reporting harassment nor redress measures. Again, media managers often fail to provide changing rooms in case journalists have to change clothes in order to discharge particular assignments or to go home after work. During night shifts or occasions such as elections when almost the entire news crew have to work overnight, no arrangements are made for female journalists to take a nap safely and comfortably. This creates great inconvenience and apprehension for the female journalists as it exposes them to sexual assault.

3. Cultural Factors

The characteristic features of the numerous ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau influence the process of entry and affirmation of women in the professional environment. From an early age, women are educated to be housewives. Parents believe that they protect the honour of their daughters through such an investment, which does not go through school education, but through a socio-cultural orientation, based on the beliefs, values and social norms defined by their socio-ethnic groups.

The influence of culture also helps to raise the ego of men who think they are superior. When the latter are confronted with the reduced number of emancipated women, they do everything to force the women to accept submission; otherwise, it would lead to conflict.

The minority of women who manage to stand out academically and professionally are targets to be suppressed once they go against the socio-cultural logic.

This is a phenomenon present in all the ethnic groups where women are not trained to face the labour market with determination, and men, for their part, are not educated to welcome the professional integration of women.

Moreover, the men do not see women as actors capable of dealing with complex tasks. They should therefore not perform complex functions, and above all, they should not position themselves where they are. Women, given their sensitivity, should not be placed in positions of great responsibility.

The traditional view that women should take their own precaution in dealing with males is another factor promoting the culture of impunity for sexual harassment of female journalists. Women are supposed to observe modesty. They should mind the way they dress and interact with males, failing which they are responsible for the consequences.

In a highly conservative society such as Guinea Bissau, there is high premium on chastity. For this reason, a lady is discouraged by her family from reporting sexual harassment, for fear of being shunned by suitors. When married, they risk being divorced by their husbands who might feel scandalised by the sexual abuse suffered by their spouse.

Unfortunately, there has not been sustained effort to tackle the cultural foundation of the prejudice against women, including journalists, which fuels attacks against them online and offline.

One of the ways to overcome this socio-cultural conflict is, therefore, to constantly raise awareness of the actors, which is a difficult task, as most of the stakeholders to change the order are predominantly men, who are mostly educated from a macho perspective.

Conclusion

The results obtained lead us to conclude that it is fundamental to create objective conditions to promote gender equality and equity in journalistic activities. The high imbalance in terms of representation of men and women in the Media (80% for men as against 20% for women) is an illustrative example. In terms of administrative management of the Media, men run more than 95% of the Media, and women, 5%. The situation is almost similar at the level of the leadership of the journalists' trade union organisations where women represent 40% while men represent 60%.

Although the number of women with higher education and/or technical training is proportional to that of men, there is a difference in terms of professional experience, as the men enjoy more privileges and career opportunities.

Cultural factors also play an important role in the safety of women journalists. They admitted that they are not used to reporting abuse related to sexual harassment because of their cultural orientations. In addition, the lack of knowledge about the different types of sexual harassment on the part of both men and women creates conditions conducive to the proliferation of this type of violation.

Whenever these violations take place online, the lack of regulations to deal with such cases constitutes a major obstacle to the practice of journalism and to the manifestation of freedom of expression on social networks. As a result, women journalists are often forced to avoid expressing opinions and points of view on a subject of public interest, to avoid being the target of insults and psychological violence.

Recommendations

The threats to the safety of women journalists are numerous and they affect women in different ways. To remedy these ills and improve the state of safety of women journalists, the following recommendations have been formulated in the light of the foregoing developments:

- Conduct awareness campaigns in newsrooms on the social role of female media professionals. Then extend this initiative to other institutions, such as media unions, government, and other public and private entities;
- Create internal rules and regulations that discourage sexual harassment in newsrooms;
- Train women in gender issues, how to diagnose, monitor and address social behaviours related to sexual harassment in the workplace;
- Introduce in newsrooms an awareness and civic education campaign on gender equity and equality in the profession;
- Legislate, adopt, and publish the Law on Online Media;
- Train women in security issues in the field;
- Promote gender equality and equity through awareness campaigns, but above all, through investment in social education, starting with the family, which is a primary social institution, up to secondary institutions, such as schools, churches, mosques, and workplaces.



MEDIA FOUNDATION FOR WEST AFRICA

32 Otele Avenue, East Legon,

Telephone: +233 (0) 302 555 327

Twitter: @TheMFWA

Facebook: Media Foundation for West Africa

info@mfwaw.org

www.mfwaw.org



@themfwa



www.mfwaw.org



themfwa