



UNESCO JOURNALIST SAFETY INDICATORS

Examining the
gendered
dimensions of
journalists' safety

Kenya
Tanzania
Uganda

2023
PROJECT
REPORT



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01

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Benjamin Franklin's profound statement, "Freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government: When this support is taken away, the constitution of a free society is dissolved," resonates with nations across the globe, including Uganda. As a nation that values democracy and human rights, the Ugandan context underscores the significance of safeguarding freedom of speech as a cornerstone of an open, inclusive, and free society.

Freedom of speech, enshrined in Uganda's Constitution, is a fundamental right that empowers citizens to express their opinions, ideas, and criticisms openly without fear of reprisals. It is a catalyst for public discourse, a driver of progress, and a tool for holding the government accountable. When individuals can voice their concerns, participate in decision-making processes, and freely debate ideas, it strengthens the foundations of democracy.

One way through which government accountability and public spending can be promoted is through providing a conducive environment for civil society and the media to share information freely. This in turn aids civil society organizations and the media to provide checks and balances to public officials. However, civic spaces continue to shrink in East Africa, especially for human rights activists and the media workers. Female journalists are targeted more disproportionately than their male counterparts, and face gender-based violence in form of stigmatisation, sexist hate speech, trolling, physical assault, rape and even murder. These threats harm their well-being, work and press freedom. While the Government and other state actors have provided some responses to mitigate these threats, much still needs to be done to produce tangible results.

It is against this background that Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) with support from UNESCO, conducted a regional research to examine the gendered dimensions of journalists' safety based on UNESCO Journalists Safety Indicators (JSI) in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. This study serves to identify actions that have been taken by various relevant stakeholders in promoting journalists' safety, especially women, and fighting impunity at both national and regional levels.



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– Benjamin Franklin

02 IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

This report is a detailed account of the project funded by UNESCO to examine the gendered dimensions of journalists' safety in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda for the period 2016 to 2021, based on the UNESCO [Journalists Safety Indicators \(JSIs\)](#).

Output 1: Examination of gendered dimensions of journalists' safety in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

The study was commissioned and completed by the [Africa Freedom of Information Centre \(AFIC\)](#) as a follow-up on the AFIC's 2020 study and recommendations on 'The Urgent Need to Address Impunity against Freedom of Expression Practitioners in Africa', which proposed for AU and Member State level interventions to strengthen legislation, implementation and oversight of the protection of journalists. The research methodology was based on UNESCO's Journalists Safety Indicators (JSIs), which recognises significant matters that show or impact the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. The research further gauges these critical issues based on [UNESCO's Gender Sensitive Indicators framework](#). The study took a qualitative nature and included both primary and secondary data collection. It used an exploratory analysis to capture journalist experiences and documented evidence and observations of media stakeholders. Secondary data covered data between a period of 2016 to 2021 and primary data was collected from key respondents including journalists, media managers, state actors, civil society actors, academia, and UN officials. 74% of the respondents were female and 26% were male. Research limitations stemmed largely from having to hold all the discussions virtually.

The country reports from the study are linked below:

- [→ Synthesized report](#)
- [→ Kenyan Report](#)
- [→ Uganda Report](#)
- [→ Tanzania Report](#)

Findings from the study reveal that:

Legal Environment

Generally, the governments of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania have put in place legal frameworks to protect journalists. However, none of the study countries had specific policies for the protection of female journalists.

In Uganda, the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda guarantees freedom of the press and other media and the country has several legal instruments that promote and protect these freedoms. The Press and Journalist Act CAP 105 ensures freedom of the press, provides for a Council responsible for regulating mass media, and establishes an institute for journalists. The Uganda Communications ACT 2013 consolidated and harmonized the Uganda Communications Act and the Electronic Media Act. UCC is charged with regulating the communication industry by issuing radio, TV, and telephone frequencies, licensing telephone operators, monitoring the use of frequencies, and generally overseeing the communication sector.

In Kenya, the Kenyan constitution does not explicitly speak to female journalists, although it provides general provisions and an opportunity for their challenges to be addressed. Chapter 4, The Bill of Rights in [Kenya's 2010 Constitution](#), recognises media rights and freedoms. Article 21, Implementation of Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, commands the state and all its organs to observe, respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the rights and fundamental freedoms in the Bill of Rights. The [Media Council Act 2013](#) is equally a step towards the protection of journalists. Kenya is equally bound by global treaties and legal instruments to which it is a signatory. These include the [African Union's Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#), which provides the legal basis for female journalists to demand better treatment. Kenya is also a signatory to the AU's Protocol to the [African Charter on Human and People's Rights on Women's Rights in Africa](#), the [African Platform for Action](#), the [1995 Beijing Platform for Action](#), and the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#).

Despite these legal provisions, journalists in Uganda and Kenya continue to work in an environment that is unsafe. In the period under review, the Human Rights Network for Journalists in Uganda documented 885 cases of violation of journalists' freedoms.[1] Meanwhile in Kenya, ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa reported that 51 attacks against individual journalists, including nine female journalists, occurred between May 2019 and April 2020,

[1] Uganda Press Freedom Index Reports (2016-2021) compiled by Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda. Available at <https://hrnjuganda.org/?wpdmcategory=hrnj-uganda-reports>

Tanzania's media freedom declined during the last seven years, primarily during the leadership of deceased former president John Pombe Magufuli, who was in office between 2016 and 2021. Magufuli undermined both media freedoms and civil society [2] with repressive and punitive legislation, punishing citizens who voiced their opinions online and discrediting dissenting voices of any kind. [3] Following Magufuli's death and the power transition to incumbent president Samia Salama Suhulu, media freedoms began to improve. Nevertheless, journalists in Tanzania work in unsafe conditions, especially female journalists.

Level of Safety of Female Journalists

Safety Issues in the Newsroom

Female journalists are less secure in newsrooms and media houses than their male counterparts. Female journalists face more sexism and misogyny, sexual harassment and cyberbullying in newsrooms at all levels, which frequently leads to self-censorship. However sexual harassment is more prominent at the entry level. The study also noted that there is an increase in awareness about sexual harassment of women journalists. Despite this, victims' confidence to speak out and report incidences is low. While majority of the media houses/companies have rules and regulations around sexual harassment, most are not deployed.

Safety Issues outside the Newsroom

Like their male counterparts, female journalists face insecurity outside the newsroom in the form of trailing, tracking, surveillance, and verbal and physical threats. Physical threats included beatings, arrests, imprisonment and kidnappings, especially during public demonstrations, strikes, or political events. More male journalists experienced physical harm than their female counterparts. Male and female journalists witnessed or experienced heightened harassment each time an impactful investigative story was published or broadcast that shed light on under-table dealings of prominent politicians, business people, and state institutions. The unending physical threats to journalists was frequently cited by female journalists as a reason for considerations to leave their professional practice. Threats to female journalists who are covering political demonstrations can have negative implications not just for individual victims, but also for the wider journalism profession and media industry, as it reinforces practices that prevent female journalists from covering topics considered sensitive or risky.

[2] Human Rights Watch. (2019). As Long As I am Quiet I am Safe: Threats to Independent Media and Civil Society in Tanzania. Published October 28, 2019. Accessed March 31, 2023. [Link](#).

[3] The Guardian. (2019). Tanzania President Magufuli Condemned for Authoritarian Rule. Published October 29, 2019. Accessed March 27, 2023. [Link](#).

From the study, it was revealed that female journalists in Tanzania experienced more self-censorship than female journalists in Kenya and Uganda. The study also observed that all stakeholders including state and political actors, CSOs, international organizations like UN agencies, academia, and the private sector had a role to play in ensuring safety of journalists through training, providing safe places and policy advocacy among others.

The study further made a series of recommendations, including:

- 01 Policy and legal reforms.** Ensure gender-responsive laws and policies are enacted and effectively implemented to improve the safety of journalists, especially female journalists who are most at risk. Gender responsiveness should be mainstreamed in state institutions that work to promote media freedoms and safety in all three countries.
- 02 Adopt safety mechanisms for journalists.** Mechanisms to tackle the high prevalence of sexism, sexual harassment, and misogyny in the newsrooms should be adopted. This should involve a deeper analysis of the gender dimension of the safety of journalists from different contexts and perspectives and the adoption of frameworks that take the lived experiences of journalists seriously. Interventions should be gender-responsive at both individual and organisational levels. Media organisations and intermediaries should implement mechanisms to guarantee the safety of journalists, especially female journalists. There should be mechanisms to support journalists in speaking up against abuse and safety concerns.
- 03 Safety training** should be included in the curricula of journalism schools, comprising elements related to gender-specific safety concerns, as well as awareness of post-traumatic stress. Safety protocols have to focus on holistic security—the psychological health of journalists exposed to traumatic experiences during their work, as well as digital and physical safety. Media professionals should be trained to recognise signs that colleagues may be afflicted by trauma so they can develop preventative measures and help facilitate timely support.
- 04 Capacity building and resourcing CSOs.** Training and capacity-building programmes for civil society organisations, as well as judicial and law enforcement sectors should be developed and effectively implemented to ensure the safety of journalists.
- 05 Media stakeholders should build partnerships and collaborations** to promote a gender-responsive, professional, and safe media industry for all.

Output 2: Launch and dissemination of findings

Following the completion of the study, the results were disseminated in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The dissemination workshops attracted key stakeholders such as journalists, CSOs and media regulatory bodies from governments.




Banner used for an event for the dissemination of findings held at Hotel Africana in Kampala, Uganda. © AFOIC

Three dissemination workshops were conducted through a press conference and a stakeholders' meeting to promote the safety of female journalists in the study countries. Specifically, the event aimed:

- **To discuss findings** from the examination of the gendered dimensions of journalists' safety based on UNESCO's JSI.
- **To propose possible solutions/ recommendations** for addressing the gendered dimensions of journalists' safety.
- **To solicit stakeholders and key policy actors' commitments** to address issues affecting female journalists' safety.

The meetings were convened to facilitate the presentation of the findings and recommendations from the report on the "Examining the gendered dimensions of journalists' safety based on UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators." A total of 163 participants attended the workshop. 91 were female and 72 were male (Uganda - 56, Tanzania - 55 and Kenya - 52).



AFIC, as the largest umbrella Civil Society Organization that promotes the right to information, transparency and inclusive involvement in Africa, acknowledges the safety concerns of journalists. Many of you have experienced issues of safety, however they are frequently viewed as isolated incidents. Because of that, no serious attention is given to these matters.

In 2011, a case of significant safety violations to a female journalist emerged in Uganda. She was physically targeted by the security forces, who did not want the coverage of a presidential candidate's expression of intent to petition affect the election results. The journalist had only wished to inform the public about it, but the security forces did not want "the cameras to be on."

AFIC took the case to the African Commission of Human and People's Rights. The government apologized and promised that such an incident would not happen again. Nevertheless, action on the case is pending. These instances are not limited to Uganda but prevalent elsewhere on the continent as well. Issues of journalists' safety span in-house gender dimensions of safety and are affected by media ownership and politics, which presents a challenge to accountability.

The rather inconclusive handling of the Ugandan journalist's case speaks to the need for constant documentation, awareness-raising and escalation of safety issues of journalists to avoid a repeat of such situations. Issues addressed in an evidence-based manner make for more effective interventions.

I therefore urge the participants to escalate safety issues faced by journalists beyond the current deliberations, and foster collaborations on this and other issues.

**– Gilbert Sedungwa,
Executive Director, AFIC
at the Dissemination of Findings workshops**

Following the opening remarks at the workshops, the study's results were presented. The following summarises headline issues that were raised at the discussions:

01 Affirmative Action in all media associations in needed.

The professional societies of senior editors in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda and members of the academia are fairly gender-sensitive. Under the current leadership, women journalists have been brought to the table—for example, the President, Vice-President and CEO of the Kenya Editors' Guild are all women. Uganda and Tanzania have two women on the executive board. The Eastern Africa Editors Society (EAES), an umbrella body that brings together editor organizations in Eastern Africa, has one female representative in its five-person membership committee. However, more affirmative action needs to be taken as voices to advocate for gendered issues that affect female journalists remain few.

02 Periodicity of Future Similar Studies

An index-based assessment using time-specific objectives and including baselines on journalists' safety should be carried out on a periodic cycle (i.e. 2 years) by experts or stakeholder groups' representatives. It was observed that social media has undergone remarkable change and thus requires a reassessment of its role. More action is needed to keep up with the realities of the evolving trends in the content generation, including the processing and dissemination of information and their impact on the safety of journalists generally.

03 Maintaining momentum and advancing issues raised in the report

Journalists were called to continue telling their own stories, such as documenting narratives from veteran female journalists, in order to move the ongoing conversations beyond meetings.

04 Enhancing Security through Clearer Identification

The identification of journalists as "The Press" using labeled jackets would distinguish them from the crowd and deter security forces or other actors from inflicting violence on them. Security officers have expressed concerns about the difficulties of identifying a journalist from crowd. Clear and proper dressing and identification will enable clearer visibility from afar.

05 Self-censorship

It was reported that internal political threats could aggravate self-censorship by journalists. For example, journalists from Tanzania must have their stories confirmed by the government before publication.

06 Of “fresh flesh”, scabs, tears, and a hostile newsroom

Sharing her experience, a journalist from Uganda told the audience: *“When I was in college, a young female lecturer told us, ‘as a lady when you walk into a newsroom, you are seen as a piece of fresh flesh that everybody wants to feast on.’”* Similar sentiments and experiences were shared in Kenya and Tanzania. Outside the newsroom, misogyny and sexism are just as severe. Some news sources “want to be interviewed in exclusive hotels for their own purposes”. Politicians engage in unhealthy “locker room” competitions on “who will bed the female journalist first”.

07 Safety policies

The workshops recognised that safety policies are crucial to protect journalists. In recent times, some donors have made this a requirement for funding. However, while these policies are in place, media houses and organizations fail to enforce them and educate their staff about them, resulting in these policies becoming “for-show-only” tools to comply with donor requirements.

08 Need for Gender Audits

Journalists can speak with a collective voice through associations and unions to call for gender audits, equal pay and working conditions. Media groups and associations can take lead on this.

In general, the three workshops concluded that questions of gender within newsrooms are not legal, but rather moral and ethical. However, reporting and actionable evidence will support sexual harassment cases when seeking legal redress. All parties agreed that more honest internal conversations about the issue need to be held.

03 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01 Activate and build capacity** of gender desks in institutions.
- 02 Develop a monitoring mechanism** for the safety of journalists within media houses and publicise findings regularly.
- 03 Strengthen reporting structures** so that victims of sexual harassment can seek redress without fear of reprisal.
- 04 Disseminate safety indicators** that media houses can use to assess the level of safety in their working environment, and make improvements accordingly.
- 05 Leverage the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists** to raise awareness about issues surrounding safety of journalists.
- 06 Mainstream gender-sensitive reporting and language**, avoiding language that demeans or objectifies a particular gender.
- 07 Call for more research and action on safety of journalists online**, particularly on social media and digital platforms.
- 08 Investigate online challenges (e.g. cyberbullying, trolling, stalking) to safety of journalists holistically**, as online attacks have implications beyond the virtual space.
- 09 Lobby for legislation in Parliaments** to protect the rights, minimum pay and working conditions of journalists in media houses, including the establishment of a Journalist Council to oversee the well-being of journalists.