



# Online Gender-Based Violence against female politicians in Ghana:

evidence from selected online platforms  
- September 2024

Funding Support:



Kingdom of the Netherlands

SEPTEMBER  
2024

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# Introduction

The internet and digital spaces have been described as an extension of the offline world and its experiences. The inequalities experienced offline are evident in online spaces as confirmed by [research](#). Meanwhile, the internet has long been identified as a powerful tool for equality and social equity. Unfortunately, millions of women remain unconnected and are, therefore, unable to tap into the unique opportunities the internet offers to both men and women. For instance, the internet and digital spaces provide exceptional platforms for all political candidates, irrespective of race, gender, age, class, tribe, political affiliation or location in the world to engage target constituents across the globe. However, a lot of women are unable to leverage this platform to pursue their political aspirations compared to their male counterparts.

A number of factors have been cited as some of the major challenges limiting women's equitable access and use of the internet to pursue their ambitions. Significant among them are issues of access, cost and affordability; low digital literacy levels; and online safety challenges, especially, Online Gender-based Violence (OGBV). In Ghana for instance, [research](#) has shown that OGBV remains one of the major hurdles for women in engaging or staying online. For women in politics and public life, the unwillingness or limited engagements online with the hope of avoiding or limiting OGBV is costing them the opportunity to sell their ideologies and campaign messages to their constituents; increase their visibility, improve engagements and garner votes.

Meanwhile, because the perpetrators of OGBV intend to silence women and push them offline, they capitalise on the same possibilities of the internet to bully and cow them into self-censorship to the detriment of their political ambitions. They attack the intelligence, character, credibility and physical looks of women to make them feel

less qualified for any position or office. The OGBV attacks do not only cow some of the active women politicians and public figures, but deter and quell the political ambitions of young women. As Ghana heads for the general elections in December 2024, OGBV perpetrators are likely to actively pursue female politicians in online spaces in their bid to silence and discredit them.

As part of efforts to mitigate and reduce the rate of occurrence of such attacks, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), with funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana, is implementing a project on Improving the safety and use of social media for female politicians in Ghana. The project aims to address women's safety issues on social media, and build the capacity of female politicians to better use the internet in advancing their political ambitions, especially towards Ghana's 2024 general elections, and beyond.

A mapping report on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana has been produced as part of the project to highlight the nature, prevalence and experiences of female politicians. Capacity building on social media use and safety practices online is also being offered to female politicians in general and some aspirants in particular. To complement these efforts, the organisation is also monitoring and reporting on the use of OGBV across five online platforms to discourage the practice; and gather scientific evidence on the issue to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations.

This report focuses on the monitoring and reporting of OGBV for the month for September 1 - 30, 2024. The methodology used and the findings from the monitoring are detailed below.

# Methodology

The monitoring and reporting of OGBV in Ghana is guided by a monitoring instrument that was developed and validated by experts in academia and industry. The content of the instrument, especially the definition and operationalization of the different types or categories of OGBV, were informed by existing literature on the subject. Once the instrument was validated, monitors were selected through a competitive process of publishing a call, shortlisting applicants and interviewing. A total of 10 monitors were recruited for the task. The monitors were trained on the validated instrument, and carried out pretesting sessions before the actual rollout of the monitoring exercise.

Five online platforms have been selected for the monitoring – Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok and Ghanaweb. The selection of these platforms was informed by existing literature, findings of MFWA’s recent mapping report on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana, and experiences and learnings from the social media context in Ghana. Whereas four of the platforms (Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram and TikTok) are social media platforms that allow for content generation and engagement, Ghanaweb is an online news portal. Ghanaweb was added because its comments section functions in a similar pattern as the other social media platforms. It allows for conversations around specific themes. Ghanaweb was also added because from findings of MFWA’s previous monitoring of social media platforms during electioneering campaigns, a lot of conversations (including some OGBV content) take place at the comments section of the platform.

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The accounts being monitored were purposively sampled to ensure that as much as possible, the accounts of many female politicians in the country could be covered. The accounts selected include the those of all female parliamentarians on the four social media platforms selected and that of the presidential and vice-presidential Candidates of the major political parties in the country (New Patriotic Party (NPP), National Democratic Congress (NDC), Convention Peoples’ Party (CPP), People’s National Convention (PNC), Movement for Change and one of the four Independent Candidates recognised by Ghana’s Electoral Commission). Also, the social media accounts of political party communicators and the spokespersons of the presidential and

vice-presidential candidates on the four social media platforms were monitored. The social media accounts of some social media influencers and popular individuals were also sampled for the monitoring. The social media accounts were randomly assigned to the trained monitors.

Using the validated instrument and a coding schedule, the monitors undertake daily monitoring (morning, afternoon, evening and night) and record their findings. Each monitor submits daily monitoring reports to the MFWA accompanied by URLs, screenshots and videos for crosschecking. The reports are vetted, collated and analysed monthly using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by a team of researchers who use the findings to produce monthly reports. The reports are then designed and published to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations.

The monitoring spans, five months (August to December 2024). The August 2024 report is [available here](#). The report below focuses on findings from the monitoring undertaken in the month of September 2024.

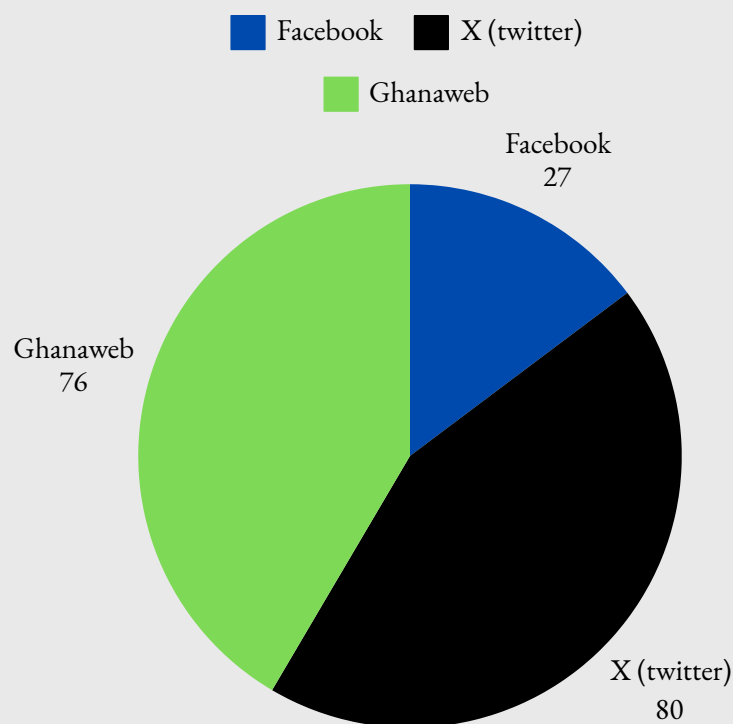
# Findings

The findings below are based on analyses of daily monitoring reports that were submitted to the MFWA from September 1 to 30, 2024 by the monitors. It broadly covers the incidents of OGBV and types of OGBV recorded during the period.

## Incidents of OGBV Recorded

A total of 361 monitoring reports were received from the monitors assigned to the sampled accounts. Whereas some of the social media accounts sampled for the monitoring were very active, some were somewhat active (with occasional posts and engagements), and others were inactive throughout the month. For the sampled accounts on Instagram and TikTok, most of them were inactive. The few that posted occasionally did not have OGBV in their posts, neither did the comments that ensued.

Altogether, 183 incidents of Online-Gender Based Violence were captured through daily monitoring in September 2024. The 183 OGBV posts were made on three online platforms – Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Ghanaweb. Instagram and TikTok did not record OGBV. The highest incidents of OGBV were recorded on X, followed by Ghanaweb and Facebook. Chart 1 presents the frequency of OGBV recorded on each platform.



The main subject of discussion around which the OGBV posts were made include issues concerning the work of Ghana’s elections management body, the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana and the EC Commissioner, Jean Adukwei Mensa. Issues of illegal mining, popularly known in Ghana as galamsey; matters arising from a demonstration by a group known as Democracy Hub; and political activities of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the major opposition political party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), were the other subjects of discussion around which a number of OGBV were made. The frequencies of the issues are presented in Table 1 below:

*Table 1: Subjects of discussion that elicited OGBV*

Issues	Frequency
Democracy hub demonstration and subsequent arrest & related issues	19
Galamsey & related issues	17
EC, alleged illegal voters transfers, and other elections-related issues	57
General politicking by the NPP & the NDC	41
Social issues	28
Other issues (including health, sports, education, among others)	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>

Results from the monitoring reports show that for many of the OGBV cases recorded, they were comments that were made in response to either a news item, an original post on social media, or a comment made about a post. In fact, only four of the OGBV cases cited were original posts made on social media; all the others were responses to the four or some news items (including opinion pieces) published on Ghanaweb, or responses to other people's comments about the original posts or the published items on Ghanaweb. Some of the OGBV comments directly related to the issues raised in the original posts/publications, however, about 87 percent of them were not directly related nor had anything to do with the original posts/publications.

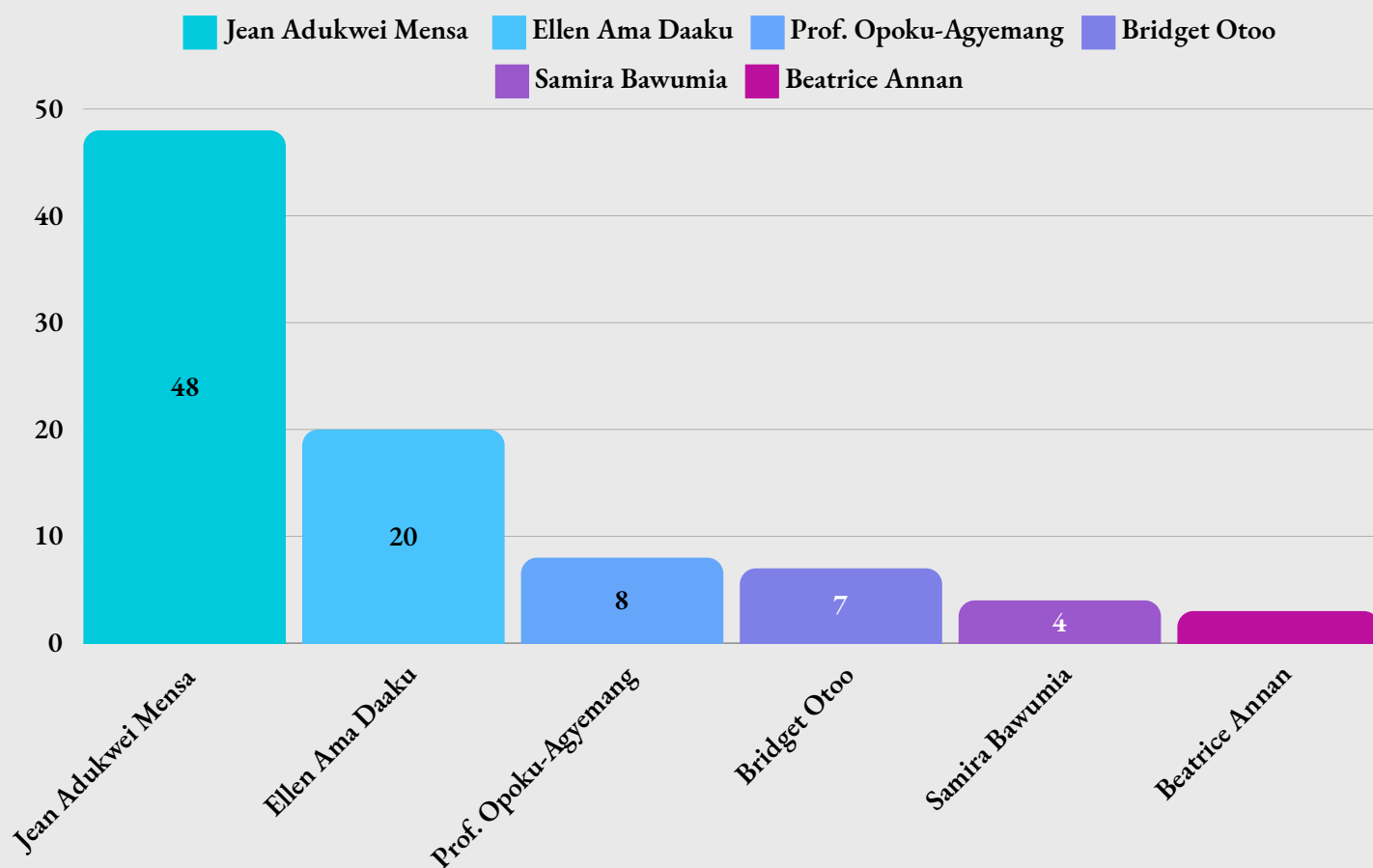
For most of the OGBV cases, the perpetrators used their personal or individual accounts (but with pseudo names) to post the OGBV, thus, making it difficult to trace or establish the real person behind the account. This generally made it a bit challenging to identify the gender and political affiliation of the culprits. However, a few could be identified. At least 22 of the accounts were identified as affiliates of the ruling NPP while 35 were identified as affiliates of the opposition NDC. By way of gender, 77 (42%) of the OGBV posts were made by males while five (3%) were made by females. The gender of the individuals who made the remaining 101 OGBV posts could not be determined. The monitoring did not capture the use of a group or corporate account in making an OGBV post.

The main targets of the OGBV cases recorded were the EC boss, female politicians and a handful of female journalists. Majority of the attacks recorded were directed at the Chairperson of Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC), Jean Adukwei Mensa. Altogether, about a quarter – 48 incidents representing 26 percent – of the 183 OGBV posts

cited were directed at her. Her personality, physical features and competence were all attacked on the three platforms (Facebook, X (Twitter) and Ghanaweb). Some physical threats were also directed at her and her family (“Husband, children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces”).

Aside from the EC boss, Ellen Ama Daaku of the NPP communications team was the next person most abused. A total of 20 (11%) OGBV posts were directed at her. She was also attacked on all the three platforms. Most of the body shaming incidents recorded were directed at her. Almost every part of her body was attacked as being masculine. At some point she was only referred to in some of the comments as ‘Man’ or ‘ManWoman.’ In one post for instance, she was referred to as “our brother.” From the monitoring reports, it appeared as though a coordinated attack was launched against her on all the platforms, especially on Facebook. In a little over half of the cited instances, the comments had no direct bearing on what she had said, but her looks. Incidentally, she (Ellen Ama Daaku) was the only female politician cited during this report period to be referring to the vice-presidential candidate of the NDC, Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as “Dishonest Grandma.” As noted in the August report, ‘grandma’ or ‘abrewa’ (old lady) is a derogatory tag people have used to label Prof. Opoku-Agyemang because of her age.

Other females who were attacked more than once with an OGBV post included Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang; Bridget Otoo, a broadcast journalist; Samira Bawumia, wife of the Vice President of Ghana; and Beatrice Annan of the NDC communications team. All the females named in this section were targeted with name-calling, derogatory remarks, body shaming and tribal slurs/hate speech. Chart 2 below displays the frequency of OGBV attacks directed at the above-mentioned women.



In most instances, the OGBV was directed at the target only. Seven of them were, however, directed at the targets and their families and/or other affiliates. In fact, two comments were calling for the murder of the targets and their families.

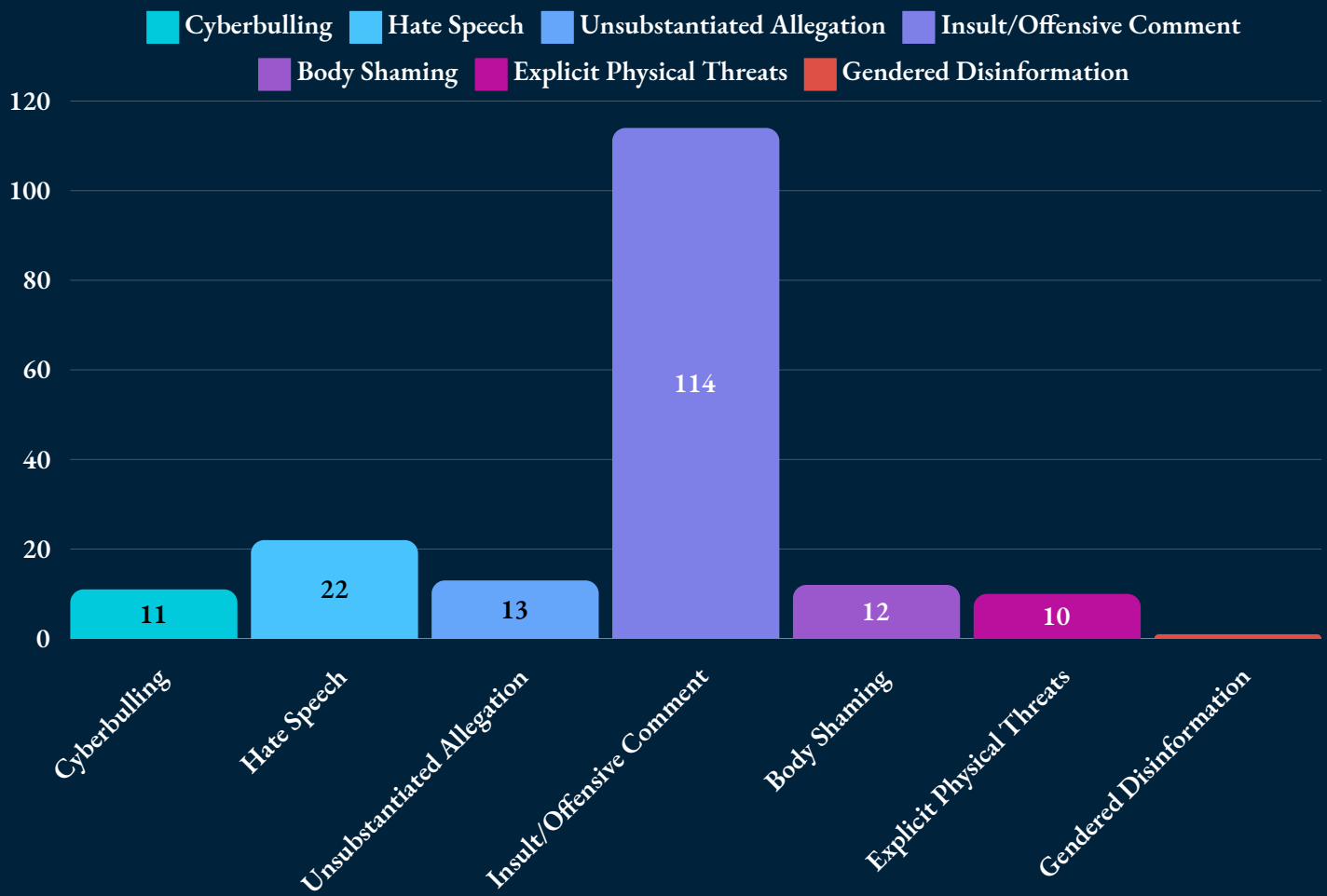
Most of the OGBV cited were made using the English language. A few were, however, made using the Akan language. Even though all the OGBVs cited in this report are troubling, majority of the OGBV comments expressed in the Akan language were very derogatory, distasteful and unprintable.

## Types of OGBV recorded

The 183 OGBV cases cited fall into seven categories of OGBV as outlined in the validated instrument being used for the monitoring by the monitors – Cyberbullying, Hate Speech, Unsubstantiated allegation, Insult/ offensive comments, Body shaming, Explicit physical threats, Gendered disinformation.

About 62 percent of the OGBV cases captured were insulting and offensive comments. The comments were made up of derogatory remarks, name-calling and other forms of attacks that do not engender goodwill for their targets. The monitoring also recorded worrying numbers of hate speech, body shaming and physical threats. Chart 3 below provides additional information about the types of OGBV recorded. It is worth noting that not all the OGBV cases cited attack the victims simply because they are women, some of them are framed just to attack, offend, insult or provoke the individual just by virtue of the person’s actions and/or inactions or the person’s political affiliation. They, however, end up reducing the person’s public standing and also intimidating and harassing the few females who have been engaging in online spaces with the hope of silencing them.





Although most of the OGBV cited were offensive and derogatory in nature, and some quite concerning, the explicit physical threats, although relatively fewer, were even more alarming. Whereas some threatened physical assault, at least four of them were calling for the elimination of the targets of their comments, and in some cases, some of their family members as well. One comment for instance read, “Very foolish & dirty woman she needs to be killed.” Although this monitoring work does not go beyond the expressed comments and audio visuals posted to analyse intent and probability of execution, the expression of the thought/opinion alone of wanting someone killed is very disturbing.

Equally worrying is the frequency and nature of the incidents of body shaming that were cited. From the

size and shape of body parts of women to the body type of women (soft/hard), different derogatory remarks were used to describe different women to demean or tease them. One comment, for instance read, “Hwe neho denden se b33ma MANWOMAN” [see her hardened body like that of a man]. Another read, “Nowadays she wears cap to cover the man face;” and yet another read, “A very masculine uncouth man” in reference to a woman. One of the comments even described a woman as a “breastless young woman.”

As observed in the August report, the use of the female genitalia (usually of a target’s mother) as insult was quite frequent and worrying. At least eleven of such occurrences were captured during the September monitoring.

# Conclusion and Recommendation



Evidence from the findings of this monitoring show that Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) is pervasive in Ghanaian online discourse. One of the major challenges the country has to deal with is how to bring the millions of Ghanaian women who are unconnected online. Aside from challenges of access, affordability and low levels of digital literacy, [research](#) has shown that one of the major challenges that keep women offline is online harassment. Therefore, if the few women online are being abused with all forms of OGBV to silence them or push them to leave online spaces, then many women will be left offline.

This is why the evidence generated from this monitoring is a great tool to inform advocacy and policy interventions. The frequencies, nature and magnitude of some of the expressions captured are in and of themselves a deterrent to some women who are already skeptical about getting into online/digital spaces. Urgent attention must, therefore, be given to OGBV issues in Ghana to ensure that the phenomenon and its impact are mitigated and reduced, if not eliminated.

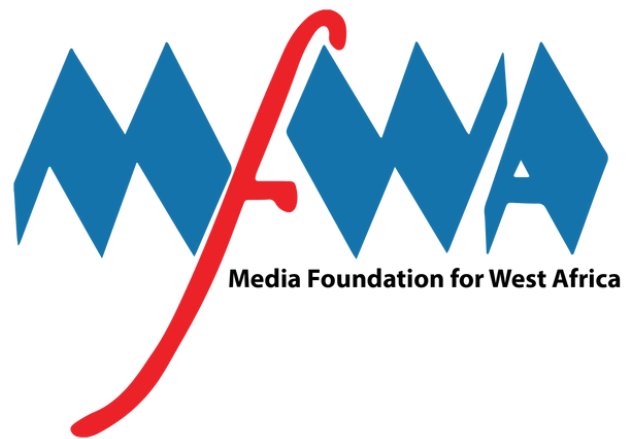
Government must, therefore, engage all relevant actors, including platform owners, tech and telecom companies, civil society, traditional leaders and academia, to brainstorm on policy interventions that can address the OGBV menace without curtailing rights to expression, opinion, information, association and assembly. There should also be more engagements with social media platform owners to discuss content moderation options in a transparent and an accountable manner as another layer in addressing the challenge.

Government must also ensure that perpetrators of OGBV are held accountable to serve as a deterrent


to others. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, in particular, must pay more attention to this challenge as it limits women's use of the internet and other digital spaces to improve their lives and potential.

Civil society and the media must also intensify educational campaigns highlighting the need to desist from the use of OGBV. Emphasis in such campaigns must be placed on the need for tolerance, civility in exchange of ideas and the need to focus on issues and not personality attacks. Content creators and influencers can complement such efforts with counter narratives to OGBV.

There is also the need for continuous empowerment of female politicians and women in general to better understand how OGBV perpetrators operate and the strategies they can employ to withstand their tactics. There must be solidarity groups that can offer peer-learning and support for victims of OGBV. Political parties must also stand up for their female politicians when they are attacked by publicly condemning such practices and supporting victims to seek legal redress.



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