



HOW DO WE ENSURE DIGITAL SECURITY AND WOMEN'S ONLINE SAFETY?



PATRICIA NYASUNA,
Programme Officer, Gender and ICT, WOUGNET

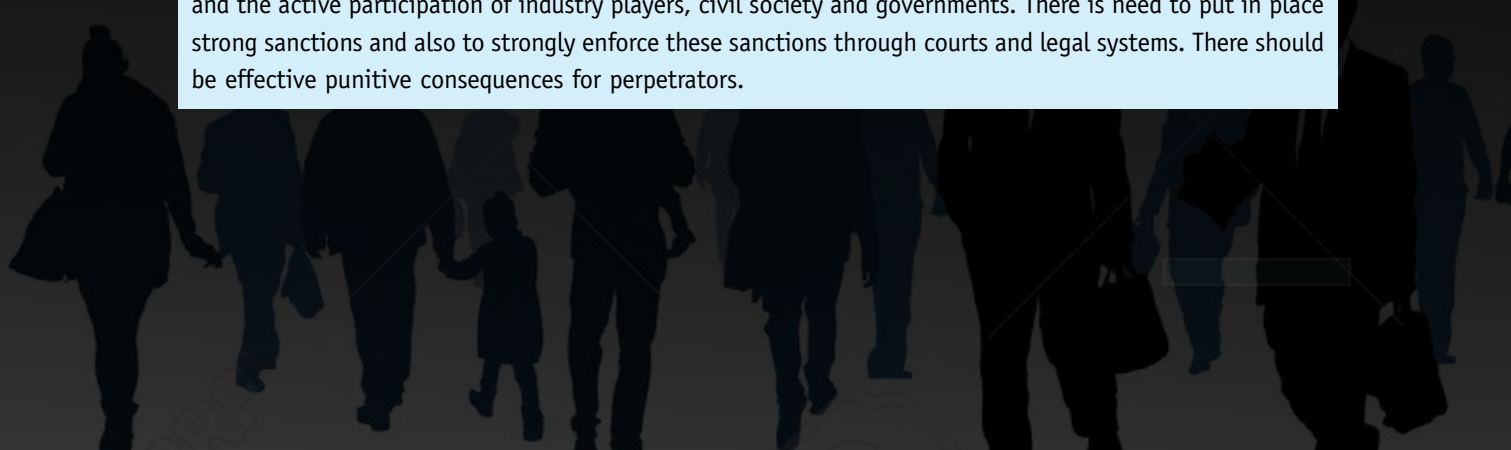
The powers that be should prioritise efforts to curb online violence against women. It is something lawmakers should know is happening and do something about it, and this should be reflected in the law and how these cases are handled. And this should not only be in the courts of law, but even at the lowest levels of administration such as Local Councils where women can access justice. It should also be part of the curriculum in schools. Students should be taught to be responsible citizens both offline and online. They should be taught that it is not right to take one's picture and share it without their consent, that it is not right to cyber harass anyone. Children should be taught from an early age about online violence against women. The impact of OVAW should be highlighted so that everyone is aware of its consequences. There is also need for support from the civil society organisations working on women's rights issues. If we are to win this war, and ensure that women and girls are free from online violence, there is need for a combined effort by everyone. Activists should come out strongly against OVAW.

STELLA BYARUHANGA,
Lecturer, Faculty of ICT, Makerere University

Industry players are important digital gatekeepers. They include internet service providers, mobile phone companies, social networking sites, online dating and gaming sites, website operators and software developers. Together with tech companies, they need to explicitly recognise cyber VAWG as unlawful behaviour, and demonstrate increased and expedited cooperation in providing relief to victims/survivors within the capacities that companies have. In particular, they can come up with better systems for cooperating with law enforcement, more effective takedown procedures for abusive and harmful content, a possibility of account termination for misconduct, and the production of transparency reports of records specific to cyber violence against women and girls, detailing how and when they have responded. Such interventions will go a long way in reducing online violence against women, henceforth ensuring their safety online. The repercussions should be severe, and any OVAW should be identified, with the space and freedom for the culprits reduced, women will once again enjoy their freedom online. Otherwise, without help from the industry players, it will be quite difficult to curb OVAW.

RACHEAL NAMANDE,
ICT Expert and Women Rights Activist

The only way to ensure the safety of girls and women online is through three best practices – that is sensitisation, safeguards and sanctions. Preventative measures through public sensitisation is important as changing social attitudes and norms is the first step to shifting the way online abuse is understood and the seriousness with which it is treated. A lot of OVAW is going on and people just don't give a damn because they don't understand it. The public and the law enforcement agencies such as the police need regular sensitisation about OVAW. Traditional violence against women safety frameworks include women's shelters, crisis centres, helplines and education. The digital world also requires safety measures to keep up with a rapidly evolving internet. Just like with traditional violence, digital safeguards require resources, attention and the active participation of industry players, civil society and governments. There is need to put in place strong sanctions and also to strongly enforce these sanctions through courts and legal systems. There should be effective punitive consequences for perpetrators.





SILVER MUHINDO,
ICT Support Engineer, Vision Group

People should not trust the internet; they should know that not everyone they communicate with is exactly who they think they are. There is a lot of pretence and trickery online. An online fraudster will, for example, inbox a victim and tell her that he has a package for her from the U.S. sent by a friend she studied with in primary school. But before she accesses the package, she has to pay \$ 500 to clear taxes. Interestingly, this person who never ordered the package and who neither expects it nor knows the sender, nor anyone else from the place where the package is coming from, pays the money. This kind of trust is difficult to understand! You should learn to verify the sources. Women should also avoid taking nudes. Besides risking having them leaked, the anti-pornography law, which deems it pornographic – which is a crime – will catch up with them. When women stop doing so, the people who take advantage of such situations by leaking them will have no chance of circulating them. Women, however, should know laws that protect them and prosecute culprits.

