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SUSTAINING MEDIA FREEDOM FOR FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN ZIMBABWE

STUDY

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Acronyms

ACHPR	African Convention on Human and People's Rights
AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
FOI	Freedom of Information Act
GMC	Gender and Media Connect
GMMP	Gender Media Monitoring Project
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IWMF	International Women's Media Foundation
MPA	Media Practitioners' Act
VMCZ	Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe
WAN-IFRA	World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers
WIN	Women in News
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZGC	Zimbabwe Gender Commission
ZMC	Zimbabwe Media Commission

1. Introduction

Female journalists in Zimbabwe do not fully enjoy media freedom, even though they have earned a place as significant players at all levels of news production and are critical to the exercise of the right to free expression. The achievements by female journalists are even more remarkable given that media freedom in Zimbabwe is restricted and sex and gender-based inequalities and discrimination further limit female journalists' exercise of this right. According to the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), in April 2023 there were 496 female media practitioners in Zimbabwe, out of a total of 1,811 registered practitioners which translates to just 27%.¹ Three editions of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in 2005, 2010 and 2015, found that women's participation as news reporters in monitored stories was only 37%, unchanging over this period.² The right to freedom of opinion and expression is a universal right protected under international law. Zimbabwe is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which it ratified in 1991. Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of expression.³ Through ratification, Zimbabwe is bound by the treaty and it is therefore imperative upon Zimbabwe to guarantee this right for everyone. The ICCPR covers the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression which is the right for everyone " to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of their choice."⁴ Media freedom is a critical component of this right as it entails not just the right of everyone to express themselves but the freedom to impart information over any media including print, radio, television and online. One of the principles in the African Convention on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa,⁵ Principle 3 on Non-discrimination, states that "everyone shall have the rights to exercise freedom of expression and access to information without distinction of any kind", including on grounds of sex or gender identity. Promoting and sustaining female journalists' right to media freedom is therefore recognized as an important principle in the exercise of the right to free expression. This paper discusses the important role that female journalists play in reporting matters of public interest as well as safeguarding their right to expression as a fundamental human right. It seeks to establish the gaps and challenges in media freedom for female journalists in an environment where enjoyment of civil and political rights and freedom is generally low. The paper will document threats to female journalists, both in and outside the newsroom from their own perspectives; and finally, proffer solutions for sustaining gender-friendly independent media in Zimbabwe.

2. Methodology

The study employed desk research of media provisions in the Constitution; laws and policies on the media; and studies on women and media freedom, focusing on threats faced by women in the media, as well as interventions made and their impact on increasing the right to media freedom. A snap survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted on the question: how do women experience media freedom? Interviews with relevant media stakeholders, including media personnel in leadership positions and media development funders in Zimbabwe were held to understand the interventions made and their impact on women's rights to expression in the media.

¹ Phiri, G, Zimbabwe Media Commission Statistics as of 15/04/2023, WhatsApp Interview with ZMC Executive Secretary- Godwin Phiri on May 05, 2023.

² WACC, Code for Africa and Gender and Media Connect, Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2020, retrieved on April 25, 2023 from <https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Zimbabwe-Report-GMMP.pdf>

³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Adopted 19 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976 art 19.

⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), retrieved on April 8, 2023, from <https://www.un.org/en/aboutus/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

⁵ African Commission on Human and People's Rights (2019). Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (2019). Retrieved from https://www.chr.up.ac.za/images/researchunits/dgdr/documents/ati/Declaration_of_Principles_on_Freedom_of_Expression_ENG_2019.pdf.

3. How do female journalists experience media freedom in Zimbabwe?

None of the respondents; from young student journalists to more experienced journalists over 50, those from different media houses and from different news specializations believed that they fully enjoy media freedom. 40% survey participants indicated that their media freedom was midway between being very sufficient and insufficient, with an additional 46.7% seeing their media freedom as very insufficient. No female journalist who participated in the survey said they found their enjoyment of media freedom very sufficient. This reflects that all female journalists regardless of age, where they work (from state, private and community media) and what news beat they work in (in categories that include politics, economy and social) do not fully enjoy media freedom. Female journalists are an indispensable part of the media in Zimbabwe, visible at all levels, including in senior and management positions, yet statistically remain under-represented. This is not surprising given that female journalists are forced to navigate not just an environment characterised by structural and institutional problems, but also patriarchal systems that permeate media structures and institutions, affecting working conditions for women and their full enjoyment of media freedom. Indices on the broad media environment show that press freedom is limited in general. Most media in the country currently face financial struggles that affect the production of news and subsequently the working conditions of journalists. Harsh laws that limit freedom of expression have been used to arrest and charge journalists and security threats to the journalists by State and non-State actors are additional issues restricting press freedom. Moreover, Covid-19 regulations that re-introduced false news provisions used to criminalize journalists in the name of false information and the harassment of journalists reporting on the pandemic showed the fragility of press freedom, as it was one of the first rights to go – alongside restrictions to freedom of movement during the crisis. Historical biases that can be traced back to several decades have left the media polarized along a private/public media dichotomy; public representing “state” or “government-controlled” media and private representing “opposition” or “independent” media. This polarization negatively affects the reporting ability of journalists, depending on perceptions of which media house they come from with those that belong to state sponsored media perceived to be able to access spaces such as the State House but restricted in terms of critical reporting on any government shortcomings. Challenges within institutions that include state capture, editorial interference and inflexible editorial policies, further encourage self-censorship and limit the rights of journalists to free expression.

3.3 Representation of women in the newsroom

None of the respondents; from young student journalists to more experienced journalists over 50, those from different media houses and from different news specializations believed that they fully enjoy media freedom. 40% survey participants indicated that their media freedom was midway between being very sufficient and insufficient, with an additional 46.7% seeing their media freedom as very insufficient. No female journalist who participated in the survey said they found their enjoyment of media freedom very sufficient. This reflects that all female journalists regardless of age, where they work (from state, private and community media) and what news beat they work in (in categories that include politics, economy and social) do not fully enjoy media freedom.

⁶ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 2023 World Press freedom Index, retrieved on April 30, 2023, from <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

⁷ Made, A. & Mpofu, N. (2005), Beyond Inequalities 2005, Women in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Center and Network (ZWRCN) and Women in Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA) program SARDC.

⁸ Zirima, P (2020). A Media Landscape Study: Unpacking Ownership in Zimbabwe’s Creation and Delivery of News Content. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung Zimbabwe and Media Monitors.

Where women are listed as part of the ownership of media companies, they are usually the partners/wives of the men linked to the ownership. For instance, Jester Media, majority shareholder of Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) is owned by Jethro Goko with a 76% shareholding and his wife, Esther Goko with 24% shareholding. ANZ owns the Daily News and 3Ktv.⁸ The community publisher, Risper Media with five registered titles, is owned by Jasper Maphosa (80%) and his wife Patrinella Ngozo (20%). In an interview, the majority shareholder Maphosa indicated that in terms of control, he and Ngozo have a 50/50 say in the running of the media house. Additional studies may need to be undertaken to assess the gender dynamics in media ownership and assess whether there are media houses owned by women as principal shareholders, and if these exist what percentage of the media industry these make up.

3.2 Women in top-level management

There are unwritten barriers to entry into media boards, leadership positions, special assignments, or decision-making roles in newsrooms. A study by the media advocacy NGO the existence of “boys clubs”, where men will prefer to promote their own. Both male and female participants in the GMC survey stated that where women are offered leadership positions it is as a “token” by some media houses and sometimes they are not enabled to inform decisions.⁹ Private media houses however have additional dynamics of their own in the appointment to senior level positions. There are very few women at the helm of media houses in Zimbabwe, as editors of newspapers or radio station managers. In traditional print and broadcast media, just four women stand out as editors: Victoria Ruzvidzo, editor of The Sunday Mail, Faith Zaba, editor of Zimbabwe Independent, Wendy Nyakurerwa-Matinde from the Manica Post and Gugulethu Ncube, editor of Umthunywa. Nyaradzo Makombe is the first female Station Manager for Zimpapers radio, a position she has held for three years. She was appointed as the Station Manager of Capitalk 100.4 leading a staff of about 30, following two predecessors who were male. These women are pioneers, as the first women appointed to head their media houses. There are high expectations of women running big media houses. Nyaradzo notes:

This is the first time that ZimPapers radio has ever had a radio station that is being run by a female and I believe this puts a lot of pressure on me in terms of testing the capacity of women in leadership. Taking into consideration that I am competing with other stations housed in Harare in terms of getting advertisers on air, we have had to be different, to give out a good product that we believe that our listeners will like. Because it's a talk radio station, it is like running a 24-hour news bulletin, which is very intense. In this digital age, we are also competing with citizen journalists, so you have to be very up to date.¹⁰

⁹ Gender and Media Connect (2022). The Status of Zimbabwean Women in Media. Unpublished report

¹⁰ Makombe, N, Experiences of women in leadership in the media in Zimbabwe, WhatsApp interview with Station Manager for Capitalk 100.4 FM - Nyaradzo Makombe on April 16, 2023.

¹¹ Zirima, P (2020). A Media Landscape Study: Unpacking Ownership in Zimbabwe's Creation and Delivery of News Content. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung Zimbabwe and Media Monitors.

It is fair to conclude that the digital media space has provided more space for female leaders in media. Digital platforms such as OpenParlyZW, Amakhosikazi, Zimbabwe Now and ZimDaily are owned or run by women.

3.3 Representation of women in the newsroom

Overall, there is under-representation of women in Zimbabwe's newsrooms. A study on women in leadership positions in the media, conducted by WAN-IFRA Women in News – a media leadership program for women in Africa - in 2022, showed that women make up 12% of leaders in business positions (CEO, Chair) and 18% in top editorial positions (editor-in-chief or executive editor) of newsrooms.¹¹ This indicates a high level of marginalization of women as men have dominated in news reporting, editorial, management and governance roles. Examples of the under-representation of women in newsrooms are reflected at Zimpapers and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings. Statistics from the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStat) on Zimpapers showed that the number of women in senior and top-level management positions (including the group editor-in-chief, editors, assistant editors, executive editors, line editors and deputy editors) declined from 15% in 2016 to 9% in 2019.

Zimpapers editorial employees by sex 2016 – 2019¹²

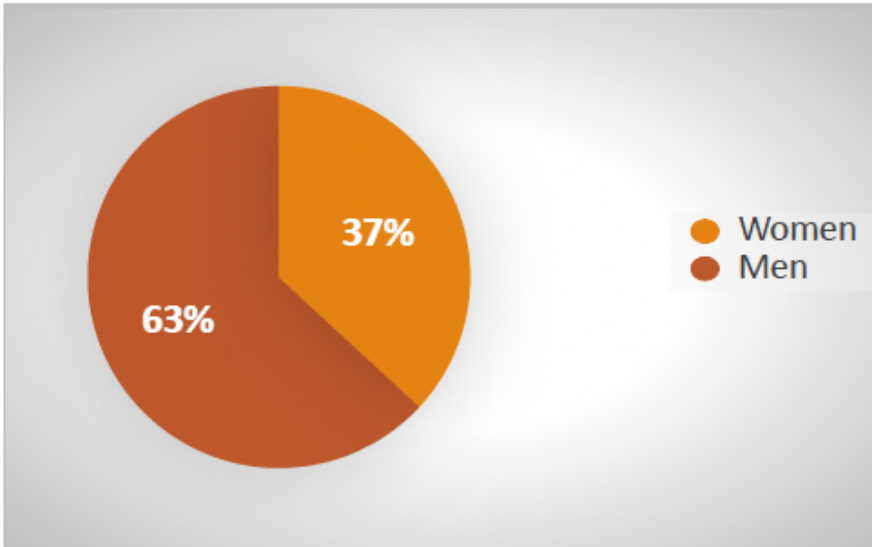
	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total number	8	44	8	52	6	50	5	46
% total	15%	85%	13%	87%	10%	90%	9%	91%

Moreover, an article that appeared in The Herald in 1992 showed that there had been no female editor of the Zimpapers flagship publication in the 100 years since the newspaper was launched in 1892. That trend has yet to be broken. At the public broadcaster, ZBC, representation of women from the CEO, managers, editors, producers and reporters stood at 37%.

¹² Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStat) (2020). Women and Men in Zimbabwe Report (2020), Harare. Retrieved April 05, 2023 from <https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/publications/Social/Gender/Women-and-Men-Report-2019.pdf>.

¹³ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStat) (2020). Women and Men in Zimbabwe Report (2020).

Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings Personnel Development¹³

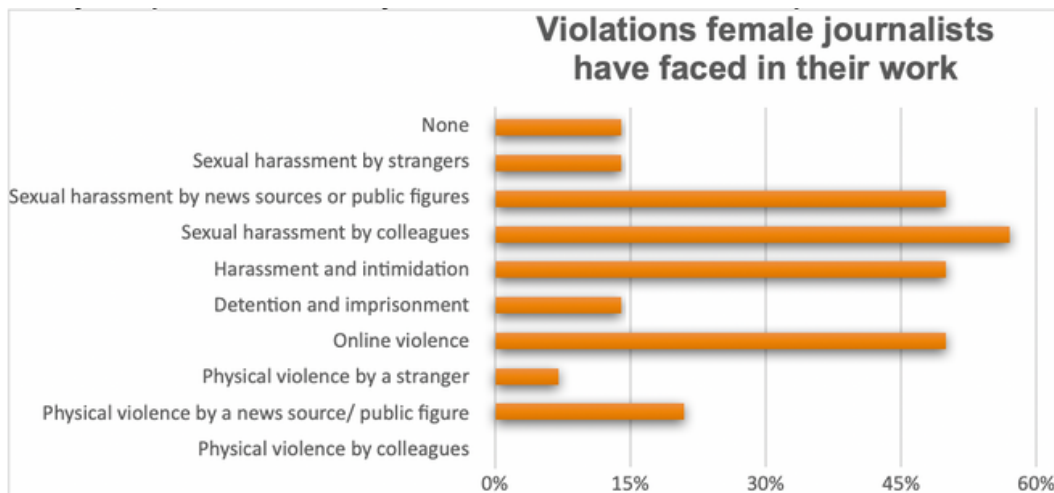


Representation of women at all levels in the newsroom have remained consistently low over time. Newer studies following the licensing of new community and broadcast media will be needed to show if these trends have shifted over the last three years.

3.4 Safety and security for women in the newsroom

Female journalists face a disturbingly high number of violations. 86% of female journalists who responded to an online survey indicated that they had faced some form of violation in the course of their work, with specific violations identified below.

Survey of experiences of female journalists conducted from 14 -24 April 2023



3.4.1 Sexual harassment

In a 2021 study by GMC, an overwhelming 73% of the respondents noted that the media sector is very hostile to female journalists, with a culture that is abusive and language that is suggestive. Women professionals complained that lewd comments were regularly made by male colleagues, male bosses and news sources regarding their body shape, choice of clothing, decorum, even marital and childbearing status.

¹⁴Gender and Media Connect (2022). The Status of Zimbabwean Women in Media. Unpublished report

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence were considered ‘normal’ practice in the industry, with most cases going unreported. It was also noted that most of the perpetrators were the same leaders who would be called upon to preside over the complaints. The study further observed that the “boys club” clique in the leadership echelons was unlikely to act against a male colleague who had become a sexual offender.¹⁴

Sexual harassment remains the most frequently cited violation against female journalists. In a 2021 survey by the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) Women in News program, 41% of women experienced verbal sexual harassment, compared to 11% of men. 27% of women, compared to 0% of men, experienced physical sexual harassment. Just less than half of the survey respondents had made a report. The other half chose not to report, either out of fear of the consequences, or did not know how to report or because there were no reporting mechanisms available.¹⁵ In an interview, one senior female journalist, Tapiwa* whose name has been changed for her safety detailed an experience with sexual harassment.

Interview excerpt 1: Experiences of Sexual harassment by Tapiwa*



I requested an interview from a familiar religious figure who is a respectable man. I had interviewed him several times at our studio, but on this occasion, he invited me to another venue, saying he could not come to the studio. I was naive and went there alone, even though we had been taught never to go and see a source alone. He was known to me, so I was not worried. I did not know the address he gave me, but it was somewhere along Samora Machel Avenue in the CBD and I did not know the place was a lodge. I should have seen the red flag, when I was directed to a room and from the looks of the people at the reception.

When I got to the room, the guy had spread red rose petals on the bed and there were drinks and food on the table. I was standing by the door, trying to process what to do. At work, there was a rule that if you go out of the studio and use resources, you need to come back with a story. I had a conversation in my head as to whether I should go ahead with the interview or not. I made a decision and sat on a chair by the door. The guy tried to make advances. I grabbed a bottle of Fanta and threatened him with it. We eventually did the interview and I left. That experience scared me because that guy could have done anything. He did not see me as a professional but as a woman. I momentarily blinked, thinking it was during the day, what could possibly happen? People outside do not see what happens when they see a story, but a lot happens behind the scenes.



3.4.2 Physical violence when reporting volatile situations

Outside the newsroom, women increasingly find themselves in spaces that pose potential physical risks when they cover volatile political situations, such as political rallies, demonstrations and other disturbances and elections. Zimbabwe in 2022 saw an increased incidence of physical attacks at events, where women were victims. Nine media violations, that included female journalists, were recorded in the 11 months from January – November 2022, with physical attacks and an arrest linked to electoral processes making up most of these attacks.¹⁶ Sandra* (Name changed for safety) and Kwekwe-based editor Chipo Gudhe relate incidents where they experienced physical violence.

¹⁵ WAN-IFRA Women in News (2021). Sexual Harassment in the Media. Retrieved on April 5, 2023 from <https://sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/research/wp-content/themes/win-sh-research-2021/reports/SexualHarassmentInTheMedia-ZIM-EN.pdf>.

¹⁶ Media Institute of Southern Africa (2022). Media violations report reported on <https://zimbabwe.misa.org/media-violations-victories/>.

Interview excerpt 2: Physical violence at the hands of state agents



I was caught up in a demonstration together with a colleague. There was tear gas ahead of us and behind. Police officers were directing people to the safest routes to use. A group of riot police officers followed us, even though I had been told they were not supposed to come towards people. They asked us who we were. I produced my press card to identify myself but was still beaten up.

The one who beat me said “imimi sevakadzi muri kutsvagei ne zera renyu iri”. (What are you as a woman doing here, and at your age?) It seemed he wanted to give us a message. I don’t think this would have happened if I was a man. I did not report the incident, although it was widely captured on camera. I regret not having reported the incident. But at that time I was confused and afraid. It was traumatic and the bosses at the media house I work for advised me to keep a low profile for a while. I stopped covering protests for some time. I would advise journalists who face this to lodge a formal report and take it from there. Once you have started the legal route, you will have a starting point. The mistake I made was not reporting. Psychological support for journalists is also necessary because we go through traumatic experiences but there is no psychological support. Even outside this incident, journalists see a lot, from accident scenes, people getting beaten up and other situations. It affects you.

*Name changed for safety



Interview excerpt 3: Working in political hotspots - Chipu Gudhe, Editor, Midlands Observer



Kwekwe is a political hot spot where you will find violent terror groups, such as the one known as “Al Shabaab”. These groups are a law unto themselves and operate with impunity. One of their leaders once threatened me in a meeting and told me that if I wrote anything he did not like he could beat me up and nothing would happen to him. I have had a run in with some political figures in the province, where I have been dragged out of bed in the morning and threatened with a gun. But sometimes when you report to the police, you feel that the police are protecting the perpetrator and not the victim.



3.4.3 Online violence

Online violence against female journalists is increasingly becoming a major threat. In a survey of female journalists in Zimbabwe, 50% of respondents indicated that they had faced online violence. Statistics globally are even higher, with a study¹⁷ conducted on the incidence of online violence, noting that three quarters of female journalists experienced online violence in the course of their work. One in five also indicated that they had been attacked online in connection with violence experienced offline. The biggest consequence of online attacks becomes self-censorship by female journalists and withdrawal from online interaction.

In an article on her experience with online trolling, Dr. Milayo Ndou a senior media executive said:



My experiences online negated the idea that being online was safe or liberating. A series of adverse interactions, over a prolonged period of time, eventually led to my complete absence, as I chose to withdraw from online interactions... To limit the harm that could be visited on me online, I adopted various forms of self-censorship and self-restriction which have had the cumulative effect of constraining my freedom of expression.¹⁸



¹⁷ Posetti J and Shabbir N (2022). The Chilling: A Global Study of Online Violence Against Women Journalists, ICFJ-UNESCO. Retrieved April 2, 2023, https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/ICFJ_UNESCO_The%20Chilling_2022_1.pdf

3.5. Media freedom, gender and intersectional issues

Female freelance journalists have an additional level of vulnerability because they do not have the support of a media house when they face difficult situations. Interviews with some freelancers show that they are sometimes prohibited from accessing some spaces and there is a collective feeling that freelance journalists are not respected as professionals. Sanele* a freelance journalist explains some of her experiences in the interview excerpt below.

Interview Excerpt 4: Experience of working as a female freelance journalist in Zimbabwe by Sanele*



It is not easy to be a freelance journalist, as we still have government officials and the public who do not understand what a freelancer is. One time I was told “ndimi muri kutengesa nyika” (You sell out the country). That aspect alone has been a challenge. You are treated with suspicion, you are not taken seriously, and people assume you are not professional. A spokesperson for one of Constitutional Commissions used to tell us that she would not speak to freelancers. I had to educate her that being a freelancer was the same as going to a private doctor. It is worse when you are a female freelance journalist because there is a perception that you are looking for freebies and for people to take care of you.

Freelance journalists are frequently barred from attending state functions. We went to the State House when former President Robert Mugabe died in 2019. When we arrived, we could sense that something was amiss. Only those who had a media house listed on their press cards were allowed in after the vetting process. I overheard one of the security guards saying there was an instruction that freelance journalists were not allowed in. 12 to 15 of us had to leave. I have never bothered to go back to State House.

Another experience was when we went to cover the current First Lady at Chikurubi prison, when she went to meet female prisoners and assess the conditions in the prison. Only journalists from Zimpapers and ZBC were allowed in. I was asked “munhu wemukadzi uri kutsvagei ipapo?” (What are you women doing there?) We were told point blank that “harisi basa revakadzi” (This is not a job for women). We now know that the first lady’s publicity team does not want private media. Even if you are allowed in, the people snoop on your story and try to tell you where to put your story. I have decided to keep away from that diary and the visit to Chikurubi was the last time I covered the First Lady.

*Name changed for safety



3.6 Self-censorship

While some threats can visibly be identified, some women interviewed for this paper expressed an underlying fear, even when they had not faced any direct violation, and has led to self-censorship in some cases. Rudo* a young woman who has been on radio for three years stated:

Interview excerpt 5: Interview with Rudo* – A young radio presenter



On my show, I get to talk about any issue I see or I come across but I know I have to stay in my lane. I have distanced myself from political issues. It is not that I do not want to talk about politics, but it is because of the landscape we work under. I have chosen to stick to fun, family-oriented issues. I stay on the safe side. What the radio station says is - if you can do it, then do but if you can't, do not. I choose to leave politics out completely because I am not trying to hang myself. You get fired very fast if you are not clear, or you attack a certain person or political party.¹⁸

*Name changed for safety



¹⁸ Dr.Ndou M, Elephant in the room – How the power of toxic social media gender trolls lies in the response of bystanders. Retrieved April 29, 2023 from <https://newswire.live/column-elephant-in-the-room-how-the-power-of-toxic-social-media-gendertrolls-lies-in-the-response-of-bystanders/>

4. Media

4.1 Media freedom and gender equality in the Constitution

Section 61 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees media freedom for “every person”. Media freedom, as guaranteed in the Constitution, applies to media outlets, including media houses, newspapers, broadcasters as well as individuals. Section 61(2) specifically enshrines the right of every person to freedom of the media, which includes protection of the confidentiality of journalists’ sources of information. Section 61(3) of the Constitution provides for freedom to establish broadcast and other electronic media of communication. The Constitution provides for editorial independence for State-owned media, in Section 61(4).

Freedom of speech is also restricted by the Constitution. Four types of speech are excluded in Section 61(5):

- Incitement to violence,
- Advocacy for hatred or hate speech,
- Malicious injury to a person’s reputation or dignity, or
- Malicious or unwarranted breach of a person’s right to privacy via speech

The Constitution places additional limitations on rights and freedoms in Section 86. Fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, may be limited in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality, public health, regional or town planning or the general public interest.

The right of female journalists to enjoy media freedom as enshrined in Section 61 is buttressed by Section 56 of the Constitution, which provides for equality and non-discrimination. This section provides, in Subsection 2, for equal treatment of women and men, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. Subsection 3 additionally provides for the right of every person not to be treated in an unfairly discriminatory manner on the grounds of sex, gender, marital status, age or pregnancy.

In freedom of expression and media regulation, while authorities have an obligation to take positive measures to promote diversity,¹⁹ this does not include legislation because press freedom principles dictate that “effective self-regulation is the best system for promoting high standards in the media”.²⁰ Media advocacy organisations in Zimbabwe have engaged in the alignment of media laws with the Constitution, based on a non-statutory regulation stance, favouring effective self-regulation and, as a compromise, a co-regulatory framework.²¹ In terms of how this relates to women’s right to free expression, the question that remains is whether gender equality can or even should be enshrined in media law and if this can be done without restricting media freedom.

¹⁹ ACHPR. Article III Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa. 22 October 2022. Retrieved on April 20, 2023. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4753d3a40.html>.

²⁰ ACHPR. Article IX Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa. 22 October 2022. Retrieved on April 20, 2023. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4753d3a40.html>.

²¹ Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (2011). Media Policy Framework for Zimbabwe – A model. <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/download/7f387784677bd9bbb6b4f66852a3ec906d635dc306e6a258f40f9a26c2e97361/473519/MEDIA%20POLICY%20Framework%20for%20Zimbabwe-%20a%20model%5B1%5D.pdf>

²² Machaira S and Barata J (2022). Global Study: Gender Equality and Media Regulation. Fojo, Linnaeus University March, 2022. Retrieved on April 19, 2023. https://fojo.se/genderandmedia/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2022/03/Gender_Equalityand_Media_Regulation-lowres.pdf.

4.2 Media laws and the reform process

A global study into gender equality and media regulation raised pertinent questions on this disparity. It illuminates that “By tradition, legislation is seen as limiting to media freedom and freedom of speech.” It proceeds to ask:

- Is it possible to regulate so that more voices are heard and for more people, men and women, to take part in public debate?
- How may societies expand freedom of expression without the cost of silencing voices?

The study noted that²² media laws and policies in Zimbabwe remain generic and do not address gender dimensions, which means that media laws are not justiciable when gender violations occur because the relevant laws treat this simply as bad conduct rather than a more serious infraction.

Media laws in Zimbabwe over the last 20 years have been weaponized and used as an instrument to limit media freedom. The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) existed for 18 years (2002 – 2020) and during this time, the main independent daily newspaper, The Daily News, was shut down, as well as journalists harassed through arrests and detentions for alleged crimes ranging from publishing falsehoods, criminal defamation, practicing without accreditation, to the deportation of foreign correspondents. Upon repeal of AIPPA by the 2020 Freedom of Information Act (FOI), there has been an expectation of media regulation being brought into line with the rights and freedoms as guaranteed in the new Constitution. In addition to the FOI Act, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) Act and the draft Media Practitioners’ Bill will complete the trio of legislation intended to replace AIPPA.

Given the history of AIPPA and other pieces of legislation that have been used against the media, a media regulatory framework geared towards a proactive promotion and protection of media freedoms, as opposed to criminalization, will aid in sustaining media freedom for all journalists. However, gaps noted in the FOI and ZMC Acts already point towards a flawed alignment process, as the laws do not do enough to strengthen freedom of expression, as guaranteed in the 2013 Constitution.

The FOI Act aims “To additionally provide for the constitutional rights of expression, and freedom of the media; to provide further for the right of access to information held by entities in the interest of public accountability or for the exercise or protection of a right; to repeal the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act [Chapter 10:27]; and to provide for matters connected therewith. The Act however retains all statutory instruments made under AIPPA, including fees payable for the accreditation of journalists by the Zimbabwe Media Commission, despite the Act not containing this provision. While the ZMC Act gives effect to Section 248 of the Constitution, it serves to entrench statutory regulation of the media, through a body that has historical significance as being “the media hangman”. Trust in this body to morph into one that protects fundamental expression rights is understandably low.

²³ Article IX and MISA Zimbabwe (2004). The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act two years on. Retrieved on April 20, 2023. <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/zimbabwe-aippa-report.pdf>

²⁴ Freedom of Information Act (Chapter 10:33). Retrieved on April 4, 2023 from https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Freedom%20of%20Information%20Act%20No.%201%20of%202020.pdf.

²⁵ Media Practitioners Bill (2022). Writeshop Draft 2. 2022

The MPA is still under construction, following various stakeholder processes to draft the law. This law, more than any other, will have the most significant impact on media practitioners and journalists, especially regarding how they work. One version of the draft law identifies Section 61 of the Constitution as a guiding principle but has no provisions that provide for the promotion of media freedom.²⁵

The draft seems to find media offences and the first section of the Bill, following the preliminary sections, deals with “publication of untruthful information”. The draft law also speaks of “disciplinary procedures”. This language seeks to wield a whip on journalists who the law seems to want to keep on a narrow path.

Starkly obvious is the gender blindness of the draft law, with a glaring absence of any reference to issues of gender inequality and harassment, that have been identified as major hindrances to the enjoyment of media freedom by female journalists in Zimbabwe and the globe.

4.3 Institutional implementation of gender equality and media freedom.

The Zimbabwe Constitution created two constitutional commissions – the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) and the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), both under Chapter 12, with the high ideal of supporting democracy and playing a role in promoting media freedom for women in media. The ZMC was created as a statutory body, in spite of reservations on statutory regulation by some members of the media industry as highlighted earlier in the paper. One of the Media Commission’s main functions is “to uphold, promote and develop freedom of the media” as stated in Section 249(1). The ZGC was created with a specific mandate to promote gender equality broadly. The National Gender Policy of 2017 commits Zimbabwe to taking “measures to promote equal access to media, ICTs, representation of women in ownership, and decision-making structures of the media through policies and dialogue.”²⁶

The silo approach of promoting media freedom in one arena and gender equality in another affects the ability of either Commission to take ownership of both gender equality and media rights, where neither of the two Commission’s founding instruments speaks to the rights of the other. The principles of media freedom for women get lost in practice.

The CEO of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, Virginia Muwanigwa, acknowledges that the ZGC has not done much on media, because they have not yet found a meeting ground with the ZMC and would not like to be seen to be encroaching on the space of the ZMC, although the Constitution does not preclude the two commissions from working with each other. She stated that “ZGC leads on gender equality and ZMC leads on the media in general”.²⁷

On the other hand, the ZMC has no strong position on gender. The ZMC Executive Secretary, Godwin Phiri, stated in a WhatsApp interview:

²⁶ Muwanigwa, V (2022). Gender Equality and Media Regulation Study: Zimbabwe. FOJO, Retrieved April 25 from https://fojo.se/genderandmedia/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2022/03/Gender_Equality_and_Media_Regulation-lowres.pdf.

²⁷ Muwanigwa, V (2023). WhatsApp conversation with Zimbabwe Gender Commission Chief Executive Officer - Virginia Muwanigwa on April 25, 2023.

²⁸ Phiri, G, Zimbabwe Media Commission Statistics as of 15/04/2023, WhatsApp Interview with ZMC Executive Secretary- Godwin Phiri on May 05, 2023.



Currently there is no policy position on gender equality and sexual harassment, especially with reference to female journalists. What we have done is develop a sexual harassment policy for the Commission and this has been approved by the Board. The idea is that we cannot go to the sector to fix something we haven't done ourselves. We intend to develop a sexual harassment template that can be adopted by media houses. We are also working on a gender policy as part of a broader social inclusion policy. The ZMC Act has gaps that limit our ability to regulate but the Constitution provides a framework for co-regulation, so we would like to mainstream gender into codes of conduct for media houses. Unfortunately, as the law stands, we can only adopt a persuasive approach with media houses as we have no legal instrument to enforce gender equality. It is important to have more activism by women on these issues which includes reporting incidents so that we do not have impunity.²⁸

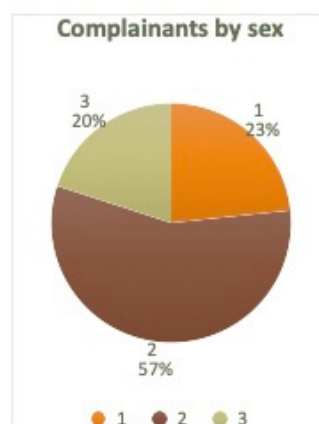


The question that remains then is where does the confluence of gender equality and media freedom lie? Who in terms of regulations, should ensure that media freedom for female journalists is promoted, protected and sustained? Apart from the contested notions of statutory vs self-regulation of the media sector, the ZMC holds a more specific mandate on the media. Using normative frameworks, such as the Windhoek +30 Declaration, that creates a framework for media freedom, including the safety and security of women journalists and gender equality in work and working conditions, the ZMC can offer guidance to the sector on gender equality in media. Within a co-regulatory framework the industry self-regulatory mechanisms have a role in promoting gender equality.

4.4 Gender equality, self-regulation and codes of conduct

The Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) is the existing self-regulatory body for the media, which provides professional standards of conduct for media practitioners. The VMCZ's Code of Conduct for Zimbabwean Media Practitioners mainstreams gender. Ideally, gender transgressions by the media can be investigated and redressed by the Council. The under-reporting of violations against women, however, points to challenges for the Council to promote gender equality fully, in and through the media, and setting precedents for gender equality in the media. The 2022 VMCZ media complaints report noted that men made up 57% of complainants to the Media Complaints Committee, with women making just 23% of complainants.²⁹

Media complaints by Sex – Media Complaints Report 2022, Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe



²⁹ Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (2023). 2022 Media Complaints Report. VMCZ. Harare.

³⁰ WACC. Who Makes the News – Global Media Monitoring Project 2020: Zimbabwe National Report. Retrieved on April 5, 2023, from <https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Zimbabwe-Report-GMMP.pdf>.

Independent accounts on gender and media, including the Global Media Monitoring Project 2020 Zimbabwe report, recommended, among other things, a Code of Conduct that works for women and children. Specifically, the report calls for a code that “emerges from broad consultation and input from stakeholders to provide a framework to address the rights of women, children and marginalized groups, and specify corrective measures to be taken in the event of violations. The code will need to be implemented in media organisations through active promotion, publication and training.”³⁰ The 2022 VMCZ complaints report also called for an investigation into under-reporting of complaints by women and other communities, including an assessment of who is lodging a complaint and who is not taking into consideration the different intersectional identity markers such as gender, sexuality, class, level of education and literacy. This will hopefully promote greater responsiveness by the media to the needs of women professionals.

5. Gender equality and media workplace practices

It is in the world of work and working conditions that gender inequality in the media is most visible. Journalists work in a diversified workplace, which requires their physical presence in the newsroom, outside the newsroom while gathering stories and online as their work is supported by a strong digital presence. ILO convention 190 of 2019 defined the workplace to include private and public spaces, places accessed for breaks and ablution facilities for paid workers, employer-provided accommodation, commuting to and from work, work trips, social events, training and work-related communication, including communication enabled by information and communication technologies.³¹ The workplace becomes a place where journalists, including the females, spend the majority of their time. Available studies on workplace practices have shown high levels of gender inequality and discrimination in newsrooms. Few organisations have operational gender policies whilst the lower salaries for women and the insecurity faced by women all contribute to these inequalities.

5.1 Gender-related company policies

A study conducted in 2010 on Zimbabwe showed that 3 out of 4 news companies surveyed reported having adopted policies on gender equality, sexual harassment and maternity leave, although none had policies on paternity leave or child-care assistance.³² A 2021 study on the status of women in media conducted by Gender and Media Connect showed that 53% of media houses interviewed do not have approved Gender Policies, Affirmative Action Policies nor gender sensitive Recruitment & Selection or Promotion Procedures. This drop could be attributed to the increased number of media houses on the market that are yet to adopt gender policies. Those that were trained by GMC indicated that they have draft Gender Policies that are still under construction or are yet to be ratified by the boards. The study also noted the lack of commitment to gender equality by some senior executives, who challenged the need to push for gender equality, arguing that they were more concerned about performance and the bottom-line as the media house is a business that is supposed to reap profits. Gender policies however, still provide a useful framework on how organisations can promote decent working conditions and greater productivity by the women and men in their employ.

³¹ ILO. C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190.

³² International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF). Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media (2010), Washington, D.C. U.S.A. Carolyn M. Byerly, Ph.D. Howard University, U.S.A. Principal Investigator. Retrieved on April 10, 2023 from <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWMF-Global-Report.pdf>.

³³ Gender and Media Connect (GMC), The Status of Zim Women in Media – Research Report 15 February 2022,

³⁴ International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF). Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media (2010)

5.2 The gender wage gap

The gender pay gap in Zimbabwe is a real issue that points to discriminatory practices. Zimbabwe media companies featured in the IWMF global study reported that in 2010 women in journalism made an annual salary of US\$2,834, while men made an average annual salary of US\$3,601., underpinning that their salaries were around 25% higher than women's³⁴ A more up to date study would be required for a current assessment of the issue. Globally however, the gender wage gap is estimated to be 23%, where women earn 77% of what men earn. In a trends analysis in 2016, ILO noted that the gender pay gap is not fully explained by education and age but is "also linked to the undervaluation of the work that women undertake and of the skills required in female-dominated sectors or occupations, the practice of discrimination, and the need for women to take career breaks to attend to additional care responsibilities, for instance after the birth of a child".³⁵

6. What works?

6.1 Views from women journalists

In the survey on sustaining media freedom for female journalists, women identified the following as possible interventions to increase their enjoyment of this right:

Legislation

1. The government should craft laws that are clear on gender-based violence in workplaces.
2. Advocacy and lobbying efforts can be undertaken to push for legal reforms that protect media freedom and the rights of female journalists. This can include engaging government officials, lawmakers, and civil society organizations to promote media freedom and gender equality.
3. Government and media authorities should take complaints about physical and sexual harassment of female journalists seriously and counter impunity for crimes against female journalists. This could include strict punitive measures to deter offences.

Newsroom policies and practices

1. There should be reforms in media house policies and practices to protect victims so that they are able to report their issues. Often people report but thereafter they are not protected or there is no follow up. Media house policies, to a large extent, protect the perpetrators.
2. Media houses should ensure that there are more women in leadership. This will set precedents for young women in the media.
3. Media houses should implement policies to protect journalists against violence and other abuse.
4. Media house policies must be clear on the repercussions of gender-based violence.

³⁵ ILO (2016). Women at Work. Trends 2016 Executive Summary. Retrieved on April 10, 2023 from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_457086.pdf

Capacity building and training

1. Training programmes can be organised to raise awareness about the importance of media freedom and the role of female journalists in promoting it. These programmes can also provide with the skills to report safely and effectively, including digital security and safety measures.
2. Female journalists can benefit from networking and mentorship programmes, which can provide them with access to resources, support and guidance. This can include connecting them with experienced journalists who can serve as mentors and role models.
3. Capacity building of female journalists to be aware of the available channels to follow when aggrieved.
4. There is need to educate women to understand and know their rights so that they are able to speak freely without feeling harassed or threatened.

6.2 Increased number of women in leadership in newsrooms makes the work environment better for junior female practitioners

Women interviewed for this paper highlighted that having more women in senior positions in the newsroom makes a difference because they offer support and protection to other women. Lyn* a radio producer/ presenter said that “My boss is a woman and she is big on women’s issues. She listens to me and she was able to help me when I was facing challenges at the radio station. When I joined the station, I worked with a team of men and it was not very welcoming. I felt left out and my voice wasn’t heard. It was only when I started working with a female presenter who gave me an opportunity to work and understand the job that radio became fun for me.”

Paidamoyo Bore, who joined H-Metro as an intern said, “If women get into the newsroom, they also protect others. The seniors know the history and experiences and they tell us. The female editors in the media group are not afraid to tell you about different issues such as corporate etiquette and professional conduct.”

6.2.1 Women championing the fight against sexual harassment in the newsroom

In her experiences with dealing with sexual harassment in the newsroom, retired journalist Ropafadzo Mapimhidze articulated some of the challenges faced in fighting this. She believes that women in leadership positions in the media are well placed as advocates against sexual harassment and therefore should be more involved.

Interview excerpt 6: Interview with retired journalist Ropafadzo Mapimhidze

6.2.2 Safe spaces for young women entering media increases the chances they will stay in journalism

Five young women who just completed their attachment in different organizations all indicated that they would be interested in going into the newsroom because they had good experiences during their internships. In a focus group discussion, the young women articulated their experiences during their internships. All indicated that they faced some challenges but all said that the internship experience was positive.

One of the challenges faced by young women is harassment, including sexual harassment. The young women however said they had been prepared to deal with it through mentorship programs by different media partners such as Gender and Media Connect and college lecturers who had taken them through what to expect. One of the young women related her experience of going from one media house to another in search of an attachment, but failing because she declined advances by senior editors.



"I wanted to be in a traditional newsroom but I eventually did not because of harassment. In the first newsroom I tried, the editor offered to take me out for pizza. In another I was offered Chicken Slice. At yet another, the editor kept insisting that I go in to see him even though that made me uncomfortable. I eventually opted to join a media NGO that produces content and it has been a good experience because I receive mentorship, even if my boss is a man. The experience has increased my confidence and I can now speak to big people. I am not fearful to take on any new challenges anymore".



I was the focal point person on issues of harassment in one of the positions I worked in. I would find time to talk to young women who I would meet, for example, in the bathroom. Some would listen but others did not. Sexual harassment was widespread in the newsroom even though it was classified as a discharge offence. The cases were dealt with by the human resources team and company managers would handle the complaint. These were all men but men will always fight in each other's corner so many cases would not go anywhere. I was consulted on what to do in specific cases and I would just play a role to listen and just be a big sister. I felt compelled to raise awareness on issues of sexual harassment because HIV was a big issue back in the day.

In one case, an intern on the entertainment desk went to cover a musical show with one of the senior guys who was also going to the evening show. On the way back he didn't drive her home like he was supposed to but they ended up at his place. She said he tried to kiss her but I strongly suspect she was raped. This happened on a weekend and she made a complaint on the Monday. I started working on the case. Emissaries were sent to me and the girl trying to get us to drop the case and eventually the girl withdrew the case, yet there was concrete evidence that something had happened. The girl eventually moved to the corporate sector and the man holds an important position in one of the ministries. In another case, a woman was beaten up in the newsroom and nothing happened. The man was eventually promoted.

People would get nasty about the role I played and I was hated at some stage because people would say "ndaivhiringidza" (I spoil things). I was called names and labelled "Mazichembere" (old woman).

In order to combat sexual harassment, there may be need to establish a system for whistle-blowers so that if someone is afraid to report they can make a complaint through a whistle-blower's box. We also need women who stand up for other women. A senior woman can be appointed as a focal person to deal with these issues.

Media houses can also come together and agree on a desk that does not involve staff. This could be at a law firm or journalist friendly organisation who can receive complaints and matters are dealt with by an independent team. As long as committees are within the newsroom, nothing much will change. In-house mechanisms are not working because it is a boys' club in the newsroom and men will defend each other for whatever reason. The offenders are protected and I think it is because the thinking is women are intruders in a profession considered a man's kingdom.



Another young lady stated,



"When I first joined the newsroom, this older man always used to bring me bananas, and I do not even like bananas. At first I did not know what to do. This used to make me uncomfortable and the other interns used to laugh at me. I knew this was not right because one day this man made an inappropriate comment about my dress. I made a decision the next day to throw the bananas in a bin where he would see them. I never received bananas again. I used to fear being in the newsroom because of all the stories we used to hear. Now I am no longer afraid. I think the newsroom I interned at is a safe space and the editor maintains his distance. It also helps that the newsroom has more women than men and there are usually no abusive comments from the men, except that one incident. There is no sexual harassment from the editor and he will always be professional. One time when we went to a Christmas party, he made sure I was safe and called out behaviour by other men from the other newsrooms. He even made sure I got home safely after the party."



All the young women in the FGD stated that they received support from senior men in their workplaces and they have been able to succeed and look forward to entering the newsroom. One of the women said: "I have enjoyed the experience because my colleagues were always there to help. There is a lot of pressure in the newsroom, so it was not easy at first. The owner of the media house is very supportive and now I have written over 85 stories and I even won an award for one of the stories. I have had a lot of good opportunities."

7. Media development, media support and role in sustaining media freedom for female journalists

Media development and support organisations have been instrumental in seeking to sustain media freedom for female journalists. Gender and Media Connect (GMC) has a specific mandate to promote gender equality in and through media and has done this over the years. Programme areas have included media policy advocacy and support to media houses in formulating and implementing gender sensitive editorial and administration policies and practices. GMC has also supported the empowerment and advancement of women through media literacy, capacity building, mentoring and training. Extensive lectures and seminars nationally on gender equality and sexual harassment have also been held.

Media development agencies, such as International Media Support and Internews with current media programmes in Zimbabwe, have been instrumental in mobilizing resources to support gender equality and the advancement of women in the media. The full extent of specific financing targeted at gender equality and supporting female journalists is not available, especially as a percentage of the whole, although some financing has been provided for work conducted by GMC as well as other partners who mainstream gender in their work.

There is a high appreciation by media development partners on specific issues to be addressed in the sector, from gender inequality in ownership, management, and the practice of journalism. Internews support has been targeted mostly at training and capacity building of female journalists in election reporting, safety and security, investigative reporting and leadership with IMS providing specific support mainly through supporting GMC programmes and mainstreaming efforts by other media support organisations. Programmes have had notable results that have included increased awareness by women of their rights, increased confidence to speak up, as well as workplace-improvements, such as the setting-up of gender desks in newsrooms, development of gender policies and increased engagement from hardliner patriarchal media players.

A gap noted in media development and financing for gender equality in the media is a project-centred approach to financing. While it is important to provide support for specific projects, a broader sector-wide approach to gender equality may be required, one that can clearly identify and articulate gaps and solutions to gender inequality in media. Both Internews and IMS, in response to questions on priorities and gaps in media development, highlighted challenges that included:

- lack of coordination of gender equality interventions and financing by local and international partners,
- limited long-term support and targeted financing to sustain consistent support to female journalist,
- limited appreciation of the importance of gender equality in the media,
- limited resources to support gender equality in media.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The paper sought to understand challenges faced by women journalists and to unpack possible ways to sustain media freedom for women in the media. Women are attaining higher positions in the media but there are still gaps in media ownership and control, which ultimately affects the ability of women to influence narratives, as well as the general enjoyment of media freedom by female journalists at all levels. The following recommendations could assist in supporting the enjoyment of media freedom for female journalists.

- A multi-stakeholder framework should be developed to guide and promote gender equality in media law, policy and practice that clearly articulates solutions, responsibilities of sector players, financing and set targets for gender equality. Guided by clear research and problem analysis, this will enable greater coordination and accountability of stakeholders to gender equality at all levels in the media.
- Media organisations must be encouraged to develop business and management models that can change gender equality in newsrooms through making a business case for gender equality.
- Media organisations should develop gender equality policies or see to the implementation of those already in existence, to increase gender equality in the workplace and protect female journalists in the course of their work. Organisations that provide safe, secure and rewarding work environments will retain more women workers and therefore access a wider pool of talent.
- Sector players at government, industry and advocacy levels must ensure gender equality and non-discrimination principles are included in law and policy, in line with the Constitution and international best practices. The law could focus on ensuring equality in media companies, including equal opportunities and treatment of women and men.
- Self-regulatory bodies must strengthen gender equality principles in codes of conduct and strive to set precedents for media conduct regarding gender equality, in full consultation with women in the media.
- Strengthened coordination of media development and support efforts and funding specifically for female journalists should be encouraged.
- An industry-specific mechanism should be put in place urgently to deal with sexual harassment, one that identifies a pipeline to prevent sexual harassment, protect and support women, as well as fight impunity for sexual harassment.
- The government of Zimbabwe must fully guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the media so as to create a conducive environment for women in the media to thrive.

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