Submission to the CSW70 Global Youth and Adolescent Recommendations

Title: The Post You Never Made: Youth Consultation on Online Bullying and Access to Justice for Girls and Young Women.
Organizer(s): BreachBuilders e.V in collaboration with Elfrida Tembo
Date: 6 December 2025
Country / Region: Malawi, Africa
Modality: Online (Zoom)
Language: English

Participation Summary

The consultation brought together a diverse group of young people to reflect on access to justice for girls and young women in Malawi, with a specific focus on online and technology-facilitated violence. The activity engaged 15 participants aged 18–30 years. Participants self-identified as girls, young women, and young men. There was also an input from Gender and Justice Unit (Malawi).

Method

The consultation was conducted as a structured 120-minute youth dialogue aligned with the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and the CSW70 priority theme on access to justice for women and girls.
The session included a plenary discussion, followed by a collective prioritization and voting exercise on the proposed recommendations. Guiding questions were adapted from the CSW70 Consultation Guide and focused on barriers and solutions related to online harassment and digital justice. Participants were encouraged to focus on systems, laws, and solutions rather than personal disclosures. Ground rules on respect, confidentiality, and constructive engagement were established at the outset.

Context

Digital platforms are increasingly central to leadership, activism, advocacy, and civic participation for girls and young women in Malawi. However, online and technology-facilitated violence, including cyberbullying, harassment, intimidation, doxxing, and image-based abuse, has emerged as a significant barrier to participation and leadership.[1] Participants highlighted that while Malawi has legal frameworks such as the Electronic Transactions and Cybersecurity Act (2016) and the Data Protection Act(2024), girls and young women continue to face challenges in accessing justice due to weak enforcement, limited awareness, and persistent social norms(cultural and other patriarchal factors) that normalize online abuse. We also discussed about the the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, especially its potential to tackle Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence (TFGBV) and what it would mean for young women and girls if Malawi was to ratify the convention.

[1] Malanga, D. F. (2021). *Survey of cyber violence against women in Malawi* (arXiv:2108.09806) [Preprint] Proceedings of the 1st Virtual Conference on Implications of Information and Digital Technologies for Development. https://arxiv.org/pdf/2108.09806. See also https://www.nyasatimes.com/gju-intensifies-gbv-fight-explores-use-of-digital-platforms-to-empower-women/

Findings

Key Barriers to Accessing Justice:

a) Knowledge and Awareness Gaps
Participants emphasized that many girls and young women lack awareness of what constitutes online harassment, their digital rights, and available justice pathways. Limited understanding of laws and reporting mechanisms discourages survivors from seeking justice.

b) Evidence and Digital Barriers
Difficulties in collecting and preserving digital evidence were identified as a major barrier. Online content is often deleted, altered, or shared anonymously, making it challenging to document harm and pursue cases.

c) Social Norms and Victim Blaming
The consultation revealed strong social norms that minimize online harassment. Practices such as turning someone's photo into a meme are often normalized or treated as jokes. Victim-blaming attitudes from peers, families, and communities further silence survivors.

d) Weak Legal and Institutional Responses
Participants noted that enforcement of existing laws remains weak due to limited understanding and capacity within institutions such as the police, schools, and regulatory bodies. Online harassment is frequently not taken seriously by duty bearers. Even when reported, no action is taken by the police or even the online platform companies.

Opportunities:
Participants also identified positive entry points, including youth-led advocacy, civil society legal empowerment initiatives, emerging digital justice tools, and the potential of education systems to strengthen prevention and awareness (human rights education).

Top Three Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Strengthen enforcement and understanding of cyber laws to ensure justice for girls and young women.

Problem:
Despite the existence of cyber and data protection laws in Malawi, girls and young women face significant barriers to justice due to weak enforcement, limited institutional capacity, and the normalization of online harassment.
Action:
The Ministry of Justice, Malawi Police Service, Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) and relevant regulatory bodies should strengthen implementation of the Electronic Transactions and Cybersecurity Act and the Data Protection Act. This includes mandatory training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and regulators on online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, the existing laws, and digital evidence handling.
Indicator:

- Increased number of reported and investigated TFGBV cases.
- Number and Percentage of trained officers demonstrating improved response capacity.

Recommendation 2: Integrate comprehensive digital safety and legal literacy education across all levels of education.

Problem:
Participants highlighted that limited digital safety literacy and legal awareness increase vulnerability to online harassment and prevent girls and young women from accessing justice.
Action:
The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with civil society organizations, should integrate age-appropriate digital safety, cyber law awareness, and legal literacy into secondary, and tertiary curricula. Content should include recognizing online abuse, preserving evidence, and accessing justice mechanisms.
Indicator:

- Number and proportion of schools and tertiary institutions implementing digital safety education in their curriculum content.
- Increased awareness levels among students measured through surveys

Recommendation 3: Expand accessible and inclusive digital justice support tools for girls and young women

Problem:
Limited internet access and low awareness of support platforms restrict access to justice, particularly for rural and marginalized girls.
Action:
The Government of Malawi, in partnership with civil society and digital service providers, should expand accessible digital justice tools such as Empower Line Malawi, including non-internet-based options like IVR systems (Interactive Voice Response), and promote global tools such as STOPNCII.org.
Indicator:

- Increased use of legal empowerment platforms
- Reach of IVR services in low-connectivity areas

Full Set of Recommendations
Below is a list of all recommendations shared by participants before voting for the three mentioned above:
A. Laws and Policies

- Simplify cyber and data protection laws using clear, accessible language.
- Review existing cyber laws to address enforcement gaps affecting girls and young women.

B. Institutions and Procedures

- Enhance the capacity of police, regulators, and schools to respond effectively to online harassment.
- Establish clear reporting and follow-up mechanisms for digital violence cases.

C. Services and Remedies

- Expand free legal empowerment platforms and survivor-centred referral systems to all parts of the country.

D. Legal Empowerment

- Integrate digital safety education into national curricula.
- Conduct national sensitization campaigns on digital rights and online safety.

E. Data and Accountability

- Collect age- and gender-disaggregated data on TFGBV cases.
- Publish annual reports on TFGBV, measures taken and impact to analyse progress.

Evidence Annex

- Electronic Transactions and Cybersecurity Act (2016) and Data Protection Act (Malawi)
- UN Women briefs on online and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls
- CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice