



GENDER-BASED HATE SPEECH

A Policy Brief



**CENTRE FOR INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY AND
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POLICY BRIEF ON GENDER-BASED HATE SPEECH

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INTRODUCTION

As countering hate and dangerous speech becomes vital worldwide, it is important to understand the nature and dimension of hate speech against the female gender (on- or offline) to properly and adequately respond to it. It is without doubt that hate speech against women takes a different form and also has unique effects on the victims. Gender-based hate speech sometimes, have double effects on the victims, as they are targeted because of their sex in combination with other forms of victimisation like religion, nationality or race. This form of hate speech is the expression of the deep seated discrimination against the female gender that has been in existence over a long period of time. At least one out of four women around the world had at a point experienced or been victimized with at least one or more form(s) of gender based hate speech on- or offline as reported by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in its report entitled "Challenges to Women's Human Rights in the EU. FRA contribution to the third Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights 'Women's rights in turbulent times November, 2017. Some studies conducted by CITAD have shown that women in Nigeria, including actresses, politicians, students, journalists and even housewives, have been targeted with hate speech including misogyny or the sexism form of hate speech. This dimension of hate speech calls for specific measures and approaches in tackling and combating it. Unfortunately, hate speech against the female gender is underreported and the present measures have failed to address it due to its prerequisites. Certain measures need to be put in place, therefore, in order to address gender hate speech. One among the most important measures is the transformation of norms and behavior that underpin gender-based hate speech, since its basis lies on gender stereotypes, such as the ideals linking masculinity to the provider role and ideals linking femininity to chastity, submission and victimhood.

Hate Speech

Hate speech is controversial and relative; what could be a hate speech to a particular individual(s) or group might not be to another. Thus, there is no universally accepted definition of hate speech in international human rights law, especially since it lies in the nexus of free speech.

At the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), therefore, we perceive hate speech as any act that is aimed at inciting the audience to denigrate against other people on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, geography and any other social conceived parameter with the purpose of marginalizing them or placing them at some disadvantage that is contrary to the provisions of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as well as the international covenants of the rights of people. This does not include the peculiar joking relations that exists in some communities, as practiced between two or more ethnic/linguistic groups that historically have been used as a conflict resolution mechanism. Hate speech has a reasonable chance of catalyzing or amplifying violence by one group against another, given the circumstances in which it is made or disseminated. An act of hate speech in this context includes any form of expression, written or spoken, including images, such as drawings or photographs and film, etc.

CITAD operationalized hate speech as any speech act that:

- Insults people on the basis of their religion
- Abuses people for their ethnic or linguistic affiliation
- Expresses contempt for people because of their place of origin
- Disparages or intimidates women or girls because of their gender
- Condone discriminatory assertions against people living with disabilities
- Abuses or desecrates symbols of cultural or religious practices.
- Denigrates or otherwise ridicules traditional or cultural institutions of other people
- Deliberate spread of false or rumours that demean or malign or ostracizes other people on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or place of origin or other or for the accident of one form of disability.

Hate/dangerous speech advocates, threatens and encourages violent acts and fosters a climate of prejudice and intolerance.

Gender-Based Hate Speech

Women are targeted through hateful and threatening speeches and expressions every day. Barely does a week go by without a sexist or misogynist comment, particularly on the internet. Studies have shown that at least one out of four women around the globe had at a point experienced or been victimized with at least one or more form(s) of gender-based hate speech on- or offline. Nigerian women are not insulated from it. Some studies conducted by CITAD have shown that women in Nigeria, including actresses, politicians, students, journalists and young girls and women, and even housewives, have been targeted with hate speech, including misogyny or a sexism form of hate speech.

Gender-based hate speech is a form that targets the female group and reveals unequal opportunities and are perceived (either by certain groups of people or generally) to be inferior to the male identity group. It includes a host of harmful behaviors that are directed at women and girls because of their sex, which is an expression of deep-seated discrimination against their gender that has been existing for a long period of time. It equally denies women their rights to equality and non-discrimination.

Misogynism is a sexist form of gendered hate speech that relates to expressions, which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on sex. Some groups of women are particularly targeted by sexist hate speech, especially celebrities, journalists/women in media, politicians, popular young women, etc. but every woman and girl is a potential target for online and offline sexist hate speech.

The forms of gender hate speech include:

1. Verbal, written or physical intimidation;
2. Insults and criticism online;
3. Glorification of sexual denigration of women in pornography;
4. Public humiliation or threat to humiliate;
5. Glorification of the denigration of women in games;
6. Threat of violence;
7. Physical attack;

8. Sexist rhetoric based on prejudice and stereotype;
9. Revenge porn;
10. Online trolling and stalking;
11. Threats and violence;
12. Incitement to gender violence;
13. Celebration of gender violence;
14. Sexual and gender harassment;
15. Morality policing/ hierarchy policing;
16. Stigmatization, etc.

The Nature of Online Gendered Hate Speech

The increasing availability and use of Internet and social platforms have contributed to growing occurrences of sexist hate speech. Similarly, the nature of online spaces and anonymity has increased online sexism and misogyny because they offer, afford and allow gendered hate speech or even hate speech of any kind to occur and make it easier for perpetrators to get away with these actions.

Inadequate Reports on Gender-Based Hate Speech

Some studies conducted at the global level have shown that hate speech against women is usually less publicized. The case is similar in Nigeria, particularly in the north where CITAD conducted some researches on online violence against women. The findings proved that rarely does violence against women online, including hate speech, is reported. In most cases, such incidents of hate speech are not given much prominence even by the media. Series of insults and threats directed against women both online and offline are barely reported and even when reported, it is mostly done from another angle such as religion or ethnicity and not from the gender perspective.

The Effects of Gendered Hate Speech on the Victims

Hate speech against women and girls has a tremendous effect on them. The online version does even more harm due to its permanence, anonymity and limitless nature. It has severe social and economic implications for women and girls. Threats of rape and death online pose a lot of fear and stress on them. It also has an adverse impact on the exercise of their free speech and other human rights. Cases of suicide or attempts have been recorded as a result of gender-based hate speech. Based on CITAD's findings, online gender violence in Nigeria has destroyed numerous relationships, including marital and family relationships. A number of women and girls have changed their patterns of behaviour to avoid victimization on and offline, resulting into self-censorship, which makes many women and girls not enjoy their right to freedom of expression. It as well discriminates and deprives them of their pride and self-esteem. Most of the victims do not want to associate themselves in public matters for fear of stigma. It has also made some women abandon their careers. Online hate speech has also deprived women and girls of numerous benefit they can get from the internet.

In essence, hate speech promotes social exclusion, leads to more hate speech and devalues women not only in the eyes of the perpetrators, but also innocent viewers. It as well produces fear, anxiety and distress and strips women of their dignity.

Hate speech is often treated as a harmless and non-serious issue and women are explicitly or implicitly told to bear with it. However, not only does sexist hate speech undermine freedom of speech for women and girls, but its psychological, emotional and/or physical impacts are real and severe. The aim of sexist hate speech is to humiliate or objectify women, to undervalue their skills and opinions, to destroy their reputation, to make them feel vulnerable and fearful and to control and punish them for not following a certain behaviour. Sexist hate speech has the effect of silencing women, obliging them to adapt their behaviour and limit their movements and participation in diverse human activities.

Are there Existing Instruments to Counter Gendered Hate Speech in Nigeria?

Gender Based hate speech demands specific measures and approaches in tackling and combating it. Unfortunately, hate speech against the female gender is underreported and the present measures have failed to address it due to its prerequisites. In Nigeria, hate speech is regarded as a crime to publicly threaten or incite violence towards another person or group on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, etc. However, there is more emphasis on religion and the ethnic aspect of hate speech and little or no emphasis is put on the gendered aspect of it. Until now, a specific law on hate speech does not exist across most of Nigeria, nor is there a section of the law that focuses particularly on protecting women and girls.

Despite the recent publicity surrounding sexist harassment and slurs, the issues of gender prejudice and misogyny were hardly emphasized in the debates surrounding the introduction quest for hate speech law in Nigeria. These harms are similarly not on the agenda of political parties and they are not addressed in present nor previous Government action plans. The outcome is a law that fails to address a form of hate speech perpetrated against women every day.

Online cultures have also contributed a lot to sexist abuse. Perpetrators seek out online communities like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. which overlook this behavior and lack concrete consequences against them. This therefore further reinforces such acts.

The Strategies for Countering Gendered Based Hate Speech: A Way Forward

Sexist hate speech needs to be addressed by all stakeholders, including the government, the public, relevant authorities, law enforcement agents and other actors of the justice system, the private sector and civil society:

- Ending gender-based violence and ensuring women's security is a priority for the Nigerian government.
- Making gender hate speech a punishable offence by establishing laws against it.
- Encourage all the relevant actors (e.g. public institutions, political parties, civil society, sport and cultural organisations) to adopt and implement codes of conducts that address sexist hate speech;
- Establishing policies and laws protecting women rights on the internet.

About CITAD

CITAD (www.citad.org) is a capacity building civil society organization whose activities covers research, advocacy, training and publicity in all areas of ICTs. Its vision is; a knowledge-based democratic society free of hunger while its mission is; using ICTs to empower citizens for a just and knowledge-based society that is anchored on sustainable and balanced development.

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