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BRIEFING NOTE

Gender-based violence in a male-dominated industry: Identifying and responding to challenges in Nigeria's Information and Communications Technology sector

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About the Viable Helpers Development Organization

The Viable Helpers Development Organization (VHDO) is a registered not-for-profit, non-governmental organization in Nigeria. Its vision is 'to be a world class organization, known for integrity, capacity and quality of service.' The organization works through various streams of development including health, education, environment, and information and communications technology. VHDO has recently worked in collaboration with its sister organization, Viable Knowledge Masters and other partners on the nature of technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) across sub-Saharan Africa.

Acknowledgements

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Key findings

- The information and communications technology (ICT) industry in Nigeria is booming, with startup valuations running to hundreds of millions of dollars. But women are under-represented in the sector and an economic divide could deepen their exclusion.
- New research in this report confirms that gender inequality is prevalent in the industry. Interviewees report that women suffer various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) – particularly psychological violence – that limit their participation in the sector.
- The gender norms that both exclude women from the sector and facilitate GBV within it include the beliefs that men are superior to and more intelligent than women, that women should not take on physically tasking ICT jobs, that older employees should command respect – particularly from younger women – and the perception of women as home-makers.
- Stakeholders also reported technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) such as the objectification of women and sharing of inappropriate images and language in online groups.
- This research also highlights how social norms that encourage women to be subservient to men and quiet and homely, and which encourage men to be outgoing and boisterous, have a strong influence on attitudes to the assigning of responsibilities and limits the achievements of women in the ICT sector
- A multi-faceted approach, therefore, is needed to address GBV in the ICT sector in Nigeria. This approach should provide equal opportunities for women, sensitise men and women on inequitable social norms, and enforce or introduce laws to target TFVA.

Background

Most people spend around one third of their time at their workplace which has, therefore, an important influence on their mental and psychosocial health (Rajgopal, 2010). While many organisations have identified the key role of the workplace in shaping health and wellbeing and have tried to address factors that have a negative impact, hidden social factors are often overlooked (Rajgopal, 2010). Gender norms that promote inequality at the workplace, for example, may go unrecognised and unchallenged in patriarchal societies. They are even more hidden in male-dominated industries that often fail to acknowledge gender-related biases, resulting in toxic work environments for those affected. Such an environment can lead to low productivity, poor motivation and absenteeism, mental health problems and burnout, including suicidal ideation (Barling, 1996).

Gender-based violence (GBV) can be manifested as a form of workplace violence as bullying, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. In Nigeria, GBV is prevalent in academic institutions, with a recent study finding that more than 40% of female staff reported having experienced sexual harassment (Agbaje et al., 2021). While GBV, including sexual exploitation and abuse, is widespread across various sectors, its predominance in some industries can widen the gender divide still further (Fawole et al., 2002; Johnson, 2010).

The information and communications technology (ICT) industry is making a tremendous contribution to the global economy (Toader et al., 2018). In Nigeria alone, the sector's contribution to GDP reached more than 17% in the second quarter of 2020 (ITEdgeNews, 2020). There is, therefore, a widespread belief that the ICT industry can lift GDP significantly in emerging economies such as Nigeria. The country has seen explosive growth in ICT companies in recent years, with valuations of relatively young start-ups running into hundreds of millions of dollars (Ekekwe, 2017; Mureithi, 2021). The country surpassed South Africa in 2019 to become the premier destination for ICT investors in sub-Saharan Africa (Ramachandran et al., 2019).

While the achievements in the ICT sector are laudable, its growth is widening a gender gap, and this must be addressed as part of efforts to address gender inequality and achieve the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). This gender gap refers to the variation by gender in resources available to entrepreneurs to foster their businesses. Put simply, if more men receive these resources than women, the economic gender gap between them will widen. The African Development Bank, for example, estimates a gender gap in financing among African entrepreneurs in excess of \$42 billion (Kazeem, 2020).

At the same time, however, and as in developed countries (Ashcraft et al., 2016), the Nigerian ICT industry faces a shortage of female workers (Ashcraft et al., 2016; Ekong and Chiemekwe, 2015). A 2019 study of emerging tech start-ups in Nigeria by ONE Campaign and the Center for Global Development found that only 30% of organisations were women-owned (Ramachandran and Omakwu, 2019). While this gender imbalance is attributed to the low participation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), some studies have identified socio-cultural and ethno-religious norms as inhibitors of women's participation in the ICT sector (Abdullahi et al., 2019; Nwakanma et al., 2016). Women tend to avoid entering the STEM sector as it is viewed as a track for men (Okeke, 2019). In addition, cultural and traditional practices – particularly family and societal expectations that a girl will get married and bear children – often deter parents from investing in training for their daughters who, they believe, will eventually be married off (Aguete and Agwagah, 2007; Okorafor et al., 2015).

Given the reigning patriarchal system in Nigeria, its presence in the ICT workplace can further inhibit women from entering into the industry or force the few in the industry to change course (Adejugbe and Adejugbe, 2018). They are held back by a combination of gender-based and stereotypical attitudes, hostile sexism and the belief that women are the weaker sex and cannot function efficiently like men (Makinde et al., 2017; Oche et al., 2020). Consequently, women are often paid less than their male counterparts in the industry (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2020).

In addition, there are recent reports about widespread sexual exploitation and abuse in the Nigerian ICT sector. In 2020, as a follow on to the global #metoo campaign,¹ a young woman used a series of tweets to expose how she was sexually harassed during a boot camp by someone she had identified as her mentor (Kazeem, 2020). While there may be many such stories in Nigeria's tech industry, a culture of silence means that such violations are rarely reported. Indeed, women who wish to remain in the industry may fear victimization and retaliation if they report such violence. This kind of abuse hampers global and regional efforts to promote women's health and well-being, as well as their access to decent work in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) three and eight.²

This problem is compounded by the rising incidence of technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) – any type of violence perpetrated through digital media – experienced by women across sub-Saharan Africa (Makinde et al., 2021). Recent investigation has shown that different types of TFVA are happening across the region, with women more likely to be abused online than men (Makinde et al., 2021). As a result, women who work in the male-dominated ICT industry are not only at risk of GBV, but may also be unduly subjected to TFVA by their male tech-savvy colleagues.

The Viable Helpers Development Organization (VHDO) investigated the social norms and practices that affect women in the ICT sector in Nigeria to identify the challenges and offer evidence-based solutions to address them. The aim is to support the creation of a more conducive work environment and healthy professional experience for women in the ICT industry and to encourage their greater involvement in the sector. As part of this research, VHDO also investigated the gender norms that prevail in the ICT industry and that affect female actors, as well as the efforts being made to address these issues by individual companies as well as collectively in the sector.

¹ The #metoo campaign is a social movement against sexual abuse and sexual harassment in which people publicise allegations of sex crimes.

² SDG 3 is 'Ensure Healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages' while SDG 8 is 'Promote sustained inclusive and economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all'.

Research objectives / rationale

This study answers the following research questions.

- Which gender norms promote inequality in the ICT industry in Nigeria and how can these be addressed?
- What are the experiences of women on gender biases in the tech industry in Nigeria?
- How is technology being leveraged to perpetrate GBV and abuse in the ICT industry in Nigeria?
- What and how effective are the response mechanisms to address gender biases and GBV in the industry?

Methodology

We conducted 23 key informant interviews (KII) (17 female and 6 male) and 1 focus group discussion (FGD) of 4 participants among male software engineers between February and May 2021. The interviewees included software developers, project managers, human resource managers and chief executive officers across the ICT industry in Lagos state and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. These interviewees cut across actors in both the public (8) and private (15) sector, as well as senior and junior officers, to provide a multi-dimensional perspective. We used KII/ FGD guides developed for this study to shape our interactions with the interviewees. These tools enabled us to standardise the process across the interviewers conducting the research. A training session among the research team members prior to data collection ensured a shared understanding of the tools. The research team then conducted data collection, analysis and preparation of this report.

Eligible interviewees were recruited through an open call on our institution's social media accounts on LinkedIn and Twitter. In addition, we leveraged our various networks to identify actors in the field and used a snowball approach to identify more interviewees, asking the stakeholders we interviewed to recommend others who could provide additional perspectives to the study.

All interviews and discussion sessions were conducted remotely over Zoom or Phone as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were first given an overview of the project and their consent to participate was sought. They were also offered the services of our retained psychologist/counsellors should their service be required as a result of the questions we would ask during the interview. All sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were anonymised and referenced only by the gender, sector (public or private) and professional level (executive, senior, mid-level) of the different interviewees. The transcripts were read repeatedly and themes were developed by the study team in line with the objectives of the study. Quotes that supported these themes were then extracted and used in the preparation of this report.

As part of our aim to gather wider knowledge, we attended two webinars/ public discussions related to our topic: 'Advancing Women's Rights Online' organized by Paradigm Initiative (24 February, 2021); and 'Tackling gender stereotypes that hold back women tech entrepreneurs in low-and-middle-income countries' organised by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women on 17 March, 2021. These webinars provided additional perspectives to our research.

Findings

The findings from the study are multi-dimensional and reflect the various perspectives presented by our wide-ranging interviewees during the sessions. Much of the feedback could be categorised as demonstrating gender-based inequalities in the workplace. There were, however, reports of instances of psychological and sexual violence; and some mention of physical violence. These are presented in detail in the next section.

Gender-based inequalities in the ICT Sector

Women in the ICT industry in Nigeria suffer, in general, from the impact of inequality in the workplace. This inequality is a major factor in the psychological violence experienced by so many of the women in the industry. One software developer pointed out that employers take advantage of women in the industry by paying them less than their male counterparts. Such observations are not limited to the ICT industry and have been reported across various industries in Nigeria (Aderemi and Alley, 2019), particularly in the private sector as was also observed in this study.

'...Sometimes they are doing same work or more and then they are having less pay.'
- Female software developer in the private sector

While the decision to pay women less than their male counterparts is often anchored in the reasoning that women are not as competent as men, several female engineers argued that this is rooted in gender bias and norms and outlined the abilities and competencies of women in support of their argument. One female computer engineer noted that while fewer females entered her college training than males, all the females graduated at the appropriate time. In stark contrast, almost half of the male students either did not graduate at the same time as their entry colleagues or had dropped out entirely from the programme because of their poor grades.

'...All six of us ladies that started, ended (completed) the course. Initially we were 23, but by the time we were graduating only 15 of us graduated in my set. A few others graduated with the sets behind us.'
- Female manager in the public sector

A female executive in the private sector highlighted that even when women are competent, many find it difficult to market themselves at face-to-face interviews, unlike their male counterparts, and that this could be one reason why fewer women make it into the tech industry. This could be the result of the social norm that girls should be quiet and unseen, unlike boys who are encouraged to be bold and outspoken. To address this unique circumstance, the executive had introduced multiple stages of evaluations (in her workplace) that assessed different aspects of the job before any oral interview. When this was conducted through a distributed rating system, women outperformed men and many more made it into the organisation. Despite their potential to excel, not all executives may be willing to go this extra mile to promote women's contribution to the technology sector. The executive felt that training opportunities that help women gain the confidence and skills to excel in such evaluation processes must be encouraged. In her words:

'... So, what we did is we created a system where there are 7 different exams and processes, and you must go through those 7 different processes online to be able to get recruited. The interview is like 5% -- that is at the end of going through that process - and then we talk to you, right! And you find out that the women will go

through this process and pass, they will go online, they will do all the different exams, they will pass and then when they come for interviews it is insignificant.'

- Female CEO from the private sector in Abuja

As well as finding it difficult to climb into leadership positions, those that find themselves in leadership or entrepreneurial roles in the industry can struggle to bring new ideas to the fore, facing a brick wall when trying to introduce change and bring about innovations. This can include either not being taken seriously or the outright stealing of their ideas. To navigate this difficulty, some female innovators tend to have male associates or companions who act as the 'front man' to take the lead while they take a backseat and steer the ship away from the probing eyes of the chauvinists. Although this approach does not solve the gender issue, one female executive described how she has used this strategy to get past the patriarchal divide when she was pioneering an ICT company in Nigeria.

'... you are dead on arrival, the moment you get in front of investors and they see that you are a woman and it's your idea and you are driving it.'

- Female CEO from the private sector in Abuja

One important consequence of this inherent bias against women in the ICT sector is that men in leadership roles systematically keep women in the roles they see as suitable for them, without discussing what their preferences or interests are or where their skills or interests lie. Any individual who works in a job they love is more likely to achieve greater heights and be more resilient in their work. Yet several female interviewees complained about supervisors making decisions on an area of specialisation without consulting them.

'I remember clearly the CEO of the IT organization he was like why would I want to venture into network in particular why not more like a desk officer where you just do software development or saying "would you be able to bend down over the desk when there's a network issue or would you be able to come on top of the roof".'

- IT project manager from the public sector

According to the Christian and Islamic doctrines practiced predominantly across the Southern and Northern parts of Nigeria respectively, women are expected to respect and submit to their husbands. This expectation is reinforced by the gender norms entrenched in the culture of many tribes across the country where the man is king, and where women are expected to be subjects who are not to be heard. This norm is transmitted into the workplace where women are rarely provided with leadership opportunities. A survey of 93 tech firms found that only 6 of them had a woman in a leadership position, highlighting the skewed dominance of men in the industry (Ramachandran and Omakwu, 2019). This gender norm results in many leadership opportunities that bypass women because of social expectations and behaviours that are unfavourable to them.

'...I know a lot of deals are made over beer and made at 1 am in the morning and how are these things possible if you also expect the woman to be the home maker?.. we have that norm and culture that it is the woman that has to be at home. If you see a woman outside by 1 am you don't even care where she's going to or if she's going for a business meeting or to close a deal, you just conclude that she's a prostitute that she's sleeping with men to get these deals.'

- Female ICT lecturer from the public sector

While women have been identified as those affected most acutely by gender bias in this discussion so far, men may also face forms of gender bias because women are seen as fragile and unable to withstand the rigour of highly technical jobs, particularly those that require physical strength. As such, men carry more responsibilities, including that could have been assigned to their female counterparts. This can leave men feeling both overburdened and with a sense of entitlement to a salary that is higher than that paid to females.

'...And on the other hand as well, you can be very soft with a woman while being stronger with a man just because she's a woman. I think that's also a form of inequality. Whereby you're taking it easier with a woman and then you're harder on the man. I think that's a subtle form of inequality.'

- Female software developer from the private sector

Gender-based violence in the ICT Sector

In addition to the inequalities outlined above, women experience different forms of GBV in the workplace. Many interviewees reported witnessing or identifying more psychological violence than sexual or physical violence, with many examples based on the social norms that place men over women in society.

'...a lot [of the violence] is psychological. I have got unverified reports of... what is it called... sexual assaults. Other ones are more psychological, where you are written off already, even before you are given an opportunity to prove yourself.'

- 32-year-old worker from the public sector

Sexual exploitation and abuse was reported across both the public and private sector. However, more respondents in the public sector noted that although stringent policies were in place to bar gender-based discrimination and abuse, they were rarely implemented as expected. In contrast, interviewees reported that GBV in the private sector can result in immediate termination of employment for the abuser.

'...one of the accountants liked one of the agents, and she says no. And they got to a point one day and she was passing by, he dragged her hand. We automatically dismissed him.'

- Female CEO from the private sector in Abuja

Appropriate sanctions are not always applied to those who abuse women and justice for the victims is rare, meaning that there is no deterrent for others who may witness such acts of GBV. This lack of action can embolden other perpetrators to display similar abusive behaviour. The experience of an IT officer in the public sector on the treatment of a female colleague by an older subordinate brings this to the fore.

'...in my office, an older driver verbally abused his younger female superior in front of the whole office while creating such a raucous (scene). But (he) only got off with people advising him not to repeat such behaviour and with no official reprimand.'

- IT officer from the public sector in Abuja

The fact that the driver was referred to as an older individual highlights some cultural norms that are transmitted to the workplace, where a younger individual cannot be seen to be 'rude' to an older person even when that person is junior to them in the organisation's structure. This cultural bias,

carried into the workplace, could explain why the driver felt able to verbally abuse his superior so boldly.

Sexual violence, including unwanted touching, sexual remarks, sexual exploitation and harassment was raised by many of the female Interviewees. While they often shied away from discussing their experiences in detail, they affirmed that such violence occurs and provided scenarios they were aware of. Their reticence to provide details could be linked to fear of potential victimisation if such information became known.

'...you do see things like this, and you have colleagues who would mention maybe this person has said this or this management staff has done this which was maybe inappropriate. But people do not generally report anything. So, I do not know whether it is because of maybe the way the organisation is, or it feels like "it's something I can handle myself without having to report to management".'

- Female manager from the public sector

'A young woman who is working with her boss late in the evening and trying to get her papers sorted or whatever, and he begins to touch her inappropriately you know, and sometimes she does not escape the dire consequences of that touch. Sometimes if she does escape it, it results in a constant harassment. The situation is endless.'

- Female CEO from the private sector

'...they are more... they are more sexual than physical, I have read of some that are physical, I have read some, I think I have heard of people that were emotionally abused, like you see their bosses insulting them or calling them names that no one deserves to be called so there is that. A boss slapping their female employee: yes, I have heard of it with both physical, emotional or sexual as well but more of sexual'

- Female data scientist from the private sector

The consequences for victims of sexual harassment from senior staff members can include having to leave their positions. This contributes to the silence and under-reporting of women who do not feel that justice will be served if they speak out. Some may be coerced to play along, just so they can keep their jobs. Women in more senior roles or those who are married may, however, be insulated from experiencing such acts of sexual harassment.

'I know there are the ones I heard, they did say that they had to leave the workplace. Yes, they had to leave the workplace. Maybe because the guy was, you know, the guy was higher than her in rank, so of course naturally, the guy would be more valuable to the company. So, some of them left, I think one or two of them left the place, just to look for another place to work, so that she doesn't cause trouble or something.'

- Female software developer from the private sector

'... to be fair I think when you are married, you are less likely to be bullied [...] people tend to feel some kind of respect for married people [more] than single and divorced people.'

- Female data scientist from the private sector

The way people dress is governed by important social norms in Nigeria, particularly in the conservative North of the country where women routinely wear body-covering hijabs and niqabs

(Pereira and Ibrahim, 2010). Women who may go against such tenets about their appearance run the risk of being vilified. This suggests that there is limited respect for personal space and that anyone can take offence at the way someone else is dressed. Women have been arrested on charges of prostitution by the Nigerian police as a result of what is called 'provocative dressing' (Alonge, 2019). This behaviour may not differ markedly from the perspective shared by a male executive from the private sector, who suggested that women may be targeted based on the perception of the potential attackers. He suggested that women who are expressive and outgoing or who share their profiles online in revealing dresses are more likely to be targeted for solicitation of sex or for sexual violence.

'Looking at it from the perspective of a woman who is quite expressive online, goes to the beach with her bikini, wears revealing clothes, etc., and puts it in her online accounts. It is not uncommon for males in the professional setting to want to flirt with her because she is quite expressive. Sexual harassment could come up because of what a gender perceives the other gender to be from their presence on social media.'

- Male vice president from the private sector

Technology-facilitated violence and abuse in the ICT sector

The proliferation of new digital media and their adoption as official means of communication in the workplace can also pave the way for new forms of abuse, particularly as those people who are 'tech-savvy' can feel anonymous and invisible on the internet. Technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) has been reported to occur in online groups used for work and can result in psychological violence and a sense that a woman is less worthy among colleagues. However, it is noted that the digital media that have been shared in such groups did not always correspond exactly to those of their colleagues.

'If you're in a group, for instance, in a Whats-app group, you find a lot of inappropriate comments going on disregarding the fact that women are also on board, on that kind of platform. You find sexist comments, you find things that are offensive being said about women in the conversation. Obviously, women will not be able to contribute to those kinds of conversations, other than to say, excuse me, this isn't appropriate for this gathering. And you just get the laughing emojis. And then everybody goes quiet for maybe one day or two before they begin the normal conversations. And then eventually, they return to their sexist and offensive comments.'

- Female IT manager from the public sector

One private sector executive highlighted her fear about going online because she was afraid of being abused. However, she works remotely and must provide services to her clients.

'I didn't want to be there online, but I had to force myself to be there because that's really where my clients will see me, they are not here in Nigeria ... so it limits the growth of a lot of businesses because people are afraid of going online you know.'

- Female executive from the private sector

She also commented on the impact of the violence that could occur as a result of the inappropriate distribution of private messages and imaging via digital technology, noting that:

'...it's as damaging as physical violence, you know. So, there should be laws against that.'

The fear of this private sector executive may however lie in the statement made by another respondent who suggested that technology can be an easy means to defame anyone. Due to the wide reach of various social media apps, they have been used as negative campaign instruments to target their victims resulting in mental health challenges for them. Some of those at the receiving end have committed suicide as a result of TFVA (Makinde et al., 2016).

'...if you are at the top everybody will want to pull you down at whatever means. And the easiest means is technology based.'

- Female ICT lecturer from the public sector

One respondent from the public sector reported that while trolling and cyberbullying often occur on social media, people in the workplace are more professional when interacting with colleagues online because of the fear of the repercussions for inappropriate behaviour.

'This happens a lot; trolling, cyber bullying, it is an everyday thing and it's real. Because now we are (in) the twenty-first century and things have moved within the cyberspace. So, everything that used to be done physically has now been done in the cyberspace. So yes, I have seen it happen on social media, blogs so yes it happens. It happens less when it's a controlled organization: you are expected to behave in a certain way because it's a formal setting. You would be held accountable for your actions. So, people are more, I would say, in a good behaviour, though not everybody, is being careful. I'm not saying it doesn't happen of course it does but maybe in very subtle way than you would think that you are being bullied'

- Female manager from the public sector

Response to GBV in the ICT sector

In general, tech companies have policies or rules in place that encourage gender equity. These were noted as being very detailed in the public sector and as preventing a gender pay gap at entry level, unlike the gap in the private sector as mentioned earlier. One repeated call from our interviewees, however, was the need for appropriate policies to address and monitor GBV risks. They also highlighted that available policies and laws, such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibitions (VAPP) Act and the Child Rights Act, were not being fully implemented. In relation to TFVA, interviewees reported that Nigeria lacks adequate laws for appropriate prosecution, and that new laws may be needed to address such violence and abuse. The need for the education of women on their rights and on how the law protects them from GBV was also highlighted.

'...I propose rather amending the ones [laws] we have than making new ones. Add a clause or two addressing the workplace as well as technology...Most laws have an enforcing body. There is always some committee some organisation that handles it like the VAPP Act'

- Female programme officer from the private sector

'...another thing I have to note here is that our laws are very deficient when it comes to this type of violence. They mostly address physical violence.'

- Female programme officer from the private sector

'It's not just to come up with policies but also to; number one, ensure that those policies in the code of conduct are actually effected. I think they need to work with governmental parastatals as well that help in enforcing these things or seeing these things through.'

- Female software developer from the private sector

'Everything starts from education. Once you start educating them, you've done like 50% of the work, because now they know their rights, they know what their right is. They know what should be done to them and what absolutely cannot be done to them. So, once they are aware, awareness is first, they are aware that if this person does this thing to me it is harassment. It is assault, this person is being violent against me, whether it is verbal or non-verbal, physical or non-physical, they already know. And then, from there, they encourage them to report this thing. I know that another problem is the stigma that comes with it that "Oh I left my job because I reported this person for doing this thing to me or saying this kind of thing to me".'

- Female software developer from the private sector

Conclusions and recommendations

The opinions of many of our interviewees were shaped by social norms that dictate that men are superior to women – norms that are crucial in promoting gender-based inequality and violence in Nigeria's ICT sector. This influenced various experiences by women in the sector, from unequal opportunities at work to outright violence. The expectation of respect related to age was also identified as a norm that promoted violence driven by a sense of entitlement. Married women and those in senior or leadership roles were felt to be more insulated from sexual violence but not from psychological violence in the workplace.

In general, the research confirms that social norms that encourage women to be subservient to men, quiet and homely, while men should be outgoing and boisterous, have a strong influence on attitudes to the assigning of responsibilities and limits the achievements of women in the ICT sector. While psychological abuse was the form of violence mentioned most frequently by interviewees, sexual and physical violence were also reported to have occurred, albeit less frequently. TFVA was not seen as very common within the ICT sector itself, despite its tech-savvy workers. When TFVA was reported, it was limited to inappropriate discussion in WhatsApp groups or the objectification of women.

Tech companies have, in general, embraced policies that encourage gender equality in the workplace, aiming to tackle the challenges posed by gender-based norms. However, several of these policies are seen as inadequate or poorly implemented and enforced by many companies, particularly in the public sector.

Seven key recommendations emerge from the research to promote gender inequality and eliminate GBV in Nigeria's ICT sector.

1. Create and strengthen policies and laws that will address inequality across workplace environments, starting from the recruitment stage.
2. Adapt or adopt gender-neutral recruitment methods that assess the multiple skills of an individual without focusing solely on verbal responses during physical interviews.
3. Enforce existing anti-discrimination policies and laws, particularly in public sector organisations.
4. Create and reinforce reporting channels and whistle-blowing policies that do not discriminate and ensure justice is served.
5. Promote targeted programmes for young girls to boost their interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at an early age. These opportunities should also provide support for public speaking.
6. Provide counselling and training sessions in workplaces for both men and women to help them understand what constitutes inappropriate behaviour, especially behaviour that promotes GBV. These sessions may also provide therapeutic opportunities for any victim of GBV at work.
7. Programmes are needed to sensitise men to the inherent gender bias in various cultural practices and beliefs, aiming to reshape behaviours around GBV and discrimination in the workplace.

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ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that is creating a global community of researchers, practitioners and thought leaders, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – discriminatory gender norms.

Through its vibrant and growing digital platform, and its events and activities, ALIGN aims to ensure that the best of available knowledge and resources have a growing impact on harmful gender norms.

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