



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM 2025 PABWALO EVENT REPORT

DIGITAL VIOLENCE, LEGAL EMPOWERMENT,
AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY.

DECEMBER, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gender and Justice Unit, in collaboration with the Southern Africa Trust co-hosted a Pabwalo event. The 2025 Pabwalo on Digital Violence convened key stakeholders to assess the state of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in Malawi.

By bringing these institutions face-to-face with survivor testimonies, we moved beyond discussion to accountability. The dialogue exposed the "enforcement gap" in our legal system and identified opportunities to strengthen coordination and protect women in public life.



THE CRISIS: WHY TFGBV MATTERS



Despite Malawi's robust legal framework, enforcement remains inconsistent, and many survivors do not report due to stigma, poor case handling, and unethical practices within the justice chain. Digital literacy challenges—most acute among girls and LGBTQI individuals—heighten vulnerability to scams, trafficking, and online abuse.



Women and girls in Malawi face digital violence across various contexts, including social media abuse, image-based exploitation, sextortion, cyberstalking, and gendered disinformation targeting those in leadership and public life. Such abuses not only silence women's voices but also limit their access to opportunities and reinforce persistent systemic inequalities.





GAPS

The Gender and Justice Unit positioned itself as the Convenor and Accountability Driver of this dialogue. By bringing together institutions—including the Malawi Police Service (MPS), MACRA, MHRC, Malawi Law Society (MLS), Ministry of Gender, and NGO-GCN—the GJU ensured that duty bearers listened to survivor testimonies first before offering their mandates and commitments.

STRONG LAWS, WEAK ENFORCEMENT

Laws are Strong, Justice is Weak Malawi has strong laws addressing TFGBV—rooted in the Constitution, the Gender Equality Act, and the Electronic Transactions and Cybersecurity Act—but enforcement remains inconsistent. Despite this robust legal framework, many survivors do not report. This is due to stigma, poor case handling, and unethical practices within the justice chain. Survivors are met with victim-blaming and, in some cases, unethical requests from service providers, which creates a hostile environment that actively discourages reporting.

DIGITAL VIOLENCE IS PUSHING WOMEN OUT OF PUBLIC LIFE

The Pabwalo highlighted how digital violence is used to exclude women from public participation. During the 2025 elections, aspiring young women and political candidates faced misogyny, political intimidation, and targeted abuse. Despite women constituting the majority of voters, they remain underrepresented among elected officials.

“Digital violence has become a tool to erase women from public life. And it somehow seems to be working.” **Bridget Oscar Phiri, Young Feminist Network.**

THE NEED FOR COORDINATED AND SIMPLIFIED RESPONSE

There is a profound need for a simplified, multi-agency approach to digital violence. TFGBV cases often become clogged in the referral chain, and survivors are not assisted in how to properly follow up the status of their cases. Clearer, simpler reporting tools are needed. Furthermore, digital literacy messaging must be translated into vernacular languages to reach all communities effectively.

6 QUOTES

“...Many are too afraid to report, many do not know where to go. Many try to seek help, only to be turned away, or told that online harassment issues are trivial. They are advised to let it go and let it blowover... I am asking for a system that works, and institutions that respond because here in Malawi digital rights are recognized as human rights.” **Bridget Oscar Phiri - Survivor**



“We are aware that the elections revealed that digital attacks are now central barriers to women's political participation. And these are reinforcing systematic discrimination despite women being the majority voters. Online abuse, misinformation, and harassment undermine female candidates' visibility, credibility, and also safety.” **Chimwemwe Grace Kussein Chief Gender and Development Officer**

“Digital violence thrives in silence. By bringing it into this collective space, we make it a public concern rather than a private shame carried by survivors. A Pabwalo ensures communities themselves drive the solutions, ask the hard questions, and demand real accountability from institutions.”

Lynda Ndovie-Jere - GJU Board Chair



GJU STRATEGIC ROLE

The Gender and Justice Unit's core mandate is to utilise the law as a tool for achieving gender equality and enhancing access to justice through legal empowerment, advocacy, and strategic partnerships.

Through the innovative Empower Line initiative, GJU connects GBV survivors with legal support and resources. **(Toll free number: 4285)**

The Gender and Justice Unit also commits to continuously ensuring that there is widespread, easily understood, simplified, and translated legal information relating to all forms of violence against women and girls.



COMMITMENTS

Each institution present made concrete commitments to act.

- **Malawi Law Society:** Provide legal clinics, support referrals, and offer representation while strengthening ethical oversight.
- **NGO-GCN:** Engage in advocacy, information-sharing, and coordination across TFGBV actors.
- **Malawi Human Rights Commission:** Continue investigating TFGBV cases and ensure decisions remain enforceable.
- **Ministry of Gender:** Strengthen service delivery, address policy gaps, and update frameworks for emerging digital issues.



- **Malawi Police Service:** Remain accessible to all survivors and ensure cyber-crime handling and referrals function effectively.
- **MACRA:** Continue to work with all national and international stakeholders to tackle all cyber-crime and be on the forefront of advocating and lobbying for policy and legal changes to reflect new technologies and emerging issues

WAY FORWARD: SUSTAINING ACTION BEYOND 16 DAYS



- **Expanded Legal Empowerment:** In 2026, we will expand the Empowerline Malawi legal platform to include more vernacular languages, ensuring legal information is accessible to the most marginalized communities.
- **Driving Case Accountability:** GJU will continue working with victims and survivors of TFGBV to ensure that the courts are being used to respond to these new and emerging forms of harms.

PARTNERS



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GBV RESPONSE



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