

# Her Stories

Addressing  
Sexual Harassment  
in the Workplace and  
Tertiary Institutions





*As women we need to start talking about sexual harassment, as a collective we are saying no to any form of harassment within our work spaces by strengthening internal policies within our institutions to ensure that they protect the most vulnerable through sexual harassment policies and through safe means that protect women when they are harassed.*

**Melissa Ndlovu**  
EWF Programmes Manager

## About Emthonjeni Women's Forum

Emthonjeni Women's Forum (EWF) Trust No CF 54/2010 (registered on 28 May 2010) is an apolitical Zimbabwean women's non-profit-making organization which seeks to prevent and respond to domestic violence, in the process assisting women realize the potential power they have to empower themselves and take a stand against all forms of violence. The goal of the organisation is to assist in preventive and responsive measures of gender-based violence and in addressing behaviour change gaps for survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence in Zimbabwe. Emthonjeni Women's Forum was founded specifically to assist women overcome domestic violence and realize their economic potential as well as creating a platform where they can share and exchange information on various issues brought about by inequalities between men and women.

## Speak Out/ Khuluma End Sexual Harassment Now



In 2020 EWF engaged in a project titled Speak Out/Khuluma End Sexual Harassment Now!. The project sought to advocate for the elimination of violence

against women and girls in the world of work and promoting their bodily integrity. This was envisioned through strengthening women's knowledge, choice, voice and agency on gender-based violence in relation to sexual harassment, influencing comprehensive workplace policies on sexual harassment and the amendment of the Labour Act in line with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 190.

The project focused on two tertiary institutions and two places of work as well as national level advocacy with the Parliament of Zimbabwe. Subsequently, EWF conducted various meetings aimed at raising awareness and also advocating for policy change and the amendment of laws that seek to address sexual harassment. The project managed to reach employees and students, equipping them with advocacy skills, knowledge of sexual harassment and empowering them with voice and agency to ensure comprehensive policies on sexual harassment. Duty bearers at the workplace and tertiary institutions were also engaged to influence policy change and effective enforcement of sexual harassment policies.

## Foreword

(Sikhathele Matambo  
Executive Director)



One of EWF's four strategic pillars for 2019-2021 is advocacy that is hinged on EWF's mission which is to provide an opportunity and platform for targeted communities to challenge behaviours, beliefs and customs that promote gender-based violence, inequality and gender injustice. For EWF, the Speak Out/ Khuluma End Sexual Harassment Now intervention was uncharted territory, a challenge and a learning curve as we explored advocacy within the corporate sector as well as tertiary institutions. While the inception of the

project in the targeted communities was an uphill task, EWF met allies in form of women in leadership and men influencers willing to see change and transformation in the world of work and institutions towards fostering violence and harassment free establishments. I am impressed by the responsiveness of duty bearers in the corporate world, institutions of learning as well as the Parliament of Zimbabwe to the voices of rights holders. I would like to encourage women to stand up, mobilise, strategise, speak out and be heard in the fight against sexual harassment. Together we have the power to influence a gender-based violence free society. I would like to express my gratitude to the Africa Women's Development Fund for supporting this initiative and believing in the EWF vision.

A number of strategies were used towards engaging women in the advocacy actions. The strategies sought to impart knowledge, strengthen women's skills in engaging in advocacy as well as creating platforms towards building women's voice and agency towards demanding for transformation and policy change within their institutions.

These Actions were done through:

- Awareness Raising.
- Advocacy skills training.
- Dialogues among women.
- Sharing of experiences and strategies towards advocacy.
- Strategic advocacy Engagements with duty bearers/solution holders.
- Proposed draft policy submissions

## KEY SUCCESSES

Parliament commits to putting in place legislative provisions that address sexual harassment

The parliament of Zimbabwe has committed to taking action towards putting in place legislative provisions addressing sexual harassment in the world of work. This is upon realising that the Labour Act Chapter [28:01] towards comprehensively addressing sexual in the world of work. The commitments were also made as a result of EWF raising awareness on the implications of sexual harassment on the Zimbabwean workforce and presentation of a

proposed to address the prevention, elimination and management of sexual harassment that pervades the world of work, guided by the ILO Convention 190 and its recommendations on eliminating and preventing violence and harassment in the world of work. The engagement saw a high level of buy in from the parliamentarians with members stating that:

*"We need to start lobbying other Parliamentary Portfolio Committees, the Speaker of Parliament and Minister Mavima so that when we table the proposal, there is necessary support". Hon Paurina Mpariwa.*

Honourable Gonese *"the Lacuna in the Act pertaining to sexual harassment is quite clear and there is need for the committee to deliberate on whether the proposal can be adopted and if it adequately covers the issues at hand"*. He further highlighted that *"it is difficult to determine penalties for SH offenders as offenses of a sexual nature are normally left to the discretion of the presiding officer to determine the penalty. This therefore necessitates the establishment of clear penalty benchmarks so as to deter potential perpetrators from engaging in unscrupulous behaviour"*.

The parliament of Zimbabwe pledged to take action on the ratification of the ILO Convention 190, speaking during a radio program Honourable Member of Parliament PaurinaMpariwa stated that:

*“The Labour Relations Act does not pronounce or protect victims, it really does not have a section that deals with sexual harassment per se, in terms of actions and punishment of perpetrators. As a committee we play an oversight role just like Parliament. When we held a meeting with Emthonjeni Womens’ Forum, we resolved that we work with Ministry officials to find out what they have done and the steps they have taken towards ratifying the ILO Convention. We are going to parliament and we are going to talk about sexual harassment and enquire on why the Zimbabwean government is dilly dallying about ratifying the Convention. This is why we have said we need to leave no stone unturned. We need answers.”*

The Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Public Service Labour and Social Welfare Honourable Emma Ncube in her commitment highlighted that *“We will also engage the Ministry so that they tell us their position, the Committee will make sure that the ILO Convention 190 is ratified. We are going to make sure that we put the ratification of ILO C 190 in our third session workplan”*.

The commitment towards taking action is an indicator of success towards advocacy to ratify ILO 190 and towards having a legislative framework that comprehensively addresses sexual harassment in the world of work.

Speaking on another radio program Honourable Svuuure said, *“We do concede that the current Labour Act does not fully include issues of sexual harassment. Even the definition itself defines sexual harassment as an unfair labour practice which shows the*

*inadequacy of the Act. Therefore, there's need for the amendment of the Act as times have changed and sexual harassment is now intense. As the Portfolio Committee we are yet to bring up a comprehensive report concerning this issue of sexual harassment."*

*"I would like to reaffirm our commitment as a committee that we will indeed get this done and want to assure everyone that we will play our part. We looked at the draft amendment and we will get the draft to the ministry" said hon Svuuere.*

Lucia Nyawo from the Parliament of Zimbabwe says they will be pushing for the ratification of the International Labour Organisation Convention 190.

*"I feel the need for the portfolio Committee to approach the ministry and find out if there are any challenges with the ratification. After the ratification, we move to domestication of the ILO Convention 190."*



## From the Zimbabwe Gender Commission

According to Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey 2015, 35% of women aged between 15 to 49 years have experienced physical violence and 14% have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence and is common in the workplace and tertiary institutions. Going by media reports in Zimbabwe, the rate of sexual harassment at tertiary institutions and at the workplace has been on the increase in the past few years despite the country being a signatory to human rights instruments and a Constitution that prohibits domestic violence. Since December 2018, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission has been conducting public awareness campaigns at tertiary institutions and at workplaces with the following objectives:

- To raise awareness on gender and sexual harassment.
- To lay out the investigative role of the Commission with regards to sexual harassment

### Why we should have Sexual Harassment Policies

Harassment of any person on the basis of his or her sex is against contemporary laws, protocols and conventions on human rights and human development<sup>[1]</sup>. Sexual harassment is not primarily about sex, but it's about power and the abuse of that power. There is considerable underreporting of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions and at the workplace. Sexual harassment in education or work place is an unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature that interferes with a student's or employee's ability to learn, study, participate in school activities or work. Such harassment can create an academic or work environment in which a person feels constantly humiliated, degraded and angry. In some cases, victims may feel they have no choice but to leave school or resign from work, and thereby they may suffer permanent damage to their careers. At the work place, this may not be cost effective as the organisation will have to refill the vacant post. Also, productivity may be low or reduced as a result of poor job satisfaction and emotional stress.



On 21 June 2019, the International Labour Conference adopted the Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206)[2]. These international instruments achieve the following:

- **Set new labour standards that recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment.**

They take into account the different complimentary roles that government, workers and employers as well as their respective organizations play in preventing and addressing violence and harassment, and provide a clear framework for action.

Article 2 of the Convention protects workers and other persons in the world of work, irrespective of contractual status, persons in training, including interns and apprentices, volunteers, job applicants, and individuals exercising the authority, duties or responsibilities of an employer.[3] The Convention applies to all sectors, whether private or public, both in the formal and informal economy, and whether in urban or rural areas.

The Convention is a binding treaty creating binding obligations for ratifying Member States to promote a violence and harassment free environment.

In Zimbabwe, while sexual harassment is alluded to in the Labour Act, this is treated as an unfair labour practice, which minimises the blameworthiness of the conduct. The Act does not provide specific guidelines on dealing with instances of sexual harassment which makes it difficult for women (who are the majority of victims) to report their cases. As such, to curb sexual harassment at educational institutions and at the workplace, the organisations should have mandatory Sexual Harassment Policies to ensure that no one at these institutions is sexually harassed. No student should be subjected to intimidating, offensive and hostile behaviours or be coerced by male lecturers to have sex in exchange for grades. No employee should be sexually harassed for any favours and any other reason. Section 51 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides for the right to human dignity[4]. Section 52 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides for right to personal security as well as freedom from all forms of

violence from public or private sources

The sexual harassment policies should therefore clearly outline the following:

- Legal definition of sexual harassment
- What constitutes sexual harassment
- Complaint procedure
- Investigative procedures to be followed (including confidentiality)
- Composition of the Disciplinary Committee
- Disciplinary measures or action to be taken against a guilty perpetrator
- How to handle false complaints
- Mandatory training of students, lectures and other staff members (at tertiary) and employers, management and other employees (work place) on sexual harassment

- A period review process to ensure that the policy is effectively setting the stage for a sexual harassment free environment

The policy should be easily accessible both in hard and soft copy. Organisations and tertiary institutions have to post the policies on their websites.

[1] Mapuranga et al (2015) *Sexual Harassment of Female Employees at a State University in Zimbabwe*

[2] ILO (2019) *Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work: ILO Convention No. 190, Recommendation No. 206, and the accompanying Resolution*

[3] *ibid*

[4] *Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Number 20 of 2013*



## The National University of Science and Technology (NUST) Develops a Stand-Alone Sexual Harassment Policy.

Following several advocacy engagements with Students Representative Council & Peer Educators the students called for the institution to take steps to protect students from sexual harassment. This prompted NUST authorities to partner with EWF in the development of a standalone sexual harassment policy as well as the whistle blower and non-retaliation policy.

One of the college authorities shared the following:-

*“Let us use what the students have shared right now and what we have unearthed ourselves in the course of duty to craft a policy to address those issues we are aware of. Crafting the sexual harassment policy will not take too long especially now that we have a directorate of Legal Affairs In-house. We can craft a policy, it won't be perfect but we can just keep on improving the policy on a continual basis.*

*There should be a clause in the policy that allows administration to keep improving the policy. I appreciate the idea that we should make our internal system effective in protecting the individual's privacy while getting down to the facts of the case.*

*Those of us that are academic researchers have over time seen the evolution of policies that protect postgraduate students that is an area that is ripe for exploitation. A sexual harassment policy has to address that. How does a supervisor and supervisee stay safe from each other? Sexual harassment. I am happy to share with students here that when it comes to supervisor and supervisee relationships, there is something we have crafted for PhDs and can now start bringing it down to lower levels of supervisor supervisee relationships.”*

## Women witnessing advocacy induced transformation in their places of work.

Through the women's Indaba meeting where women were able to share their advocacy experiences and successes, the women shared the following:



Another participant highlighted that *“I feel a bit safer in the workspace because I know my war is being fought in other areas.* While another participant highlighted that *“We are now able to tell our superiors what we want and interrogate our policies with our leaders.”* The women feeling safe within the workspace and building confidence towards engaging

Women used to suffer from sexual harassment in silence but the advocacy training conducted by Emthonjeni Women's Forum brought about change as more women are now able to stand up and speak out against it.

those in leadership is a positive step towards fostering accountability in the workplace as well women's agency towards interrogating institutional policies and suggesting policy alternatives.

*“Takaita meeting tikititokumbirakuti vachinje nzira yavakanyoranayo, vakabvumavakachinja, tinoda vana vedu vashande vachifara not wachitwa kunge mahure. The casual workers have suffered the tanga wandida problem and now we have been empowered to speak out. (We held a meeting with the leaders, and we asked them to make policy changes , they agreed and made the changes. We want our children to work in a safe environment where they are not viewed as prostitutes. The casual workers have suffered more with bosses demanding they have affairs with them in order to get employment,”* said Nomar a retail store employee.

A retail store buying manager said she is impressed that the whole programme was not just a talk show but equipped female employees with advocacy skills and knowledge on how to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace.

*“The project was not a talk show but traction has taken place, we are no longer*

*standing where we were standing when this program began. The Human Resources Director declaring Zero tolerance to sexual harassment gave me confidence to wear my heels,”* said the buying manager.

Their eagerness to engage leaders from the organisation reveals citizen agency and urge to take action on issues that affect them. The eagerness to bring change to the working environment is also a positive step in the realisation of the elimination of sexual harassment in the world of work.





## College authorities addressing students' advocacy needs

Authorities at Bulawayo Polytechnic College stated that the Speak Out/ Khuluma, End Sexual Harassment Now! a campaign implemented by Emthonjeni Women's Forum has influenced change in their institution.

The college authorities highlighted that most students were not aware of what constituted sexual harassment despite the college having a sexual harassment policy document. They acknowledged that the advocacy engagements with EWF, made students and lecturers aware of the existence of a sexual harassment policy. Bulawayo Polytechnic Principal Gilbert Mabasa reported that he has seen a boost in the confidence levels of his students who have started opening up on cases of sexual harassment perpetrated against them.

*"The number of our students who are now speaking about issues of sexual harassment*

*has increased. They are now coming forward to speak freely about any situation where there might be an element of sexual harassment".*

*"The fact that students are now able to identify what sexual harassment is, I think that is the Most Significant Change because some would assume its normal when its actually harassment."*

Chiedza Masanganise the Vice Principal at Bulawayo Polytechnic College committed to reviewing the policy in line with observations from interactions with the students.

*"When the new learning term begins, we have a standard operating procedure that we have set that will be distributed to staff and the students which is what we will expect from the students and the staff members. Sexual harassment happens between the students themselves and also staff members are involved. As they come to the institution, we expect them to go through the standard operating procedure and abide it and these regulations will give guidelines on how they are supposed to behave in line with the institution's sexual harassment policy".*

The college authorities have also committed to posting their sexual harassment policy on the website so that it is easily available to any student who visits the site.

## Clothing retail outlet to set up counselling services to employees who are sexually harassed



Employees from a leading clothing and textile outlet called for the setting up of psycho-social services for survivors of sexual harassment within the workplace.

The employees said they would also want justice for those who have previously been violated.

Speaking during an online engagement organized by Emthonjeni Women's Forum, one of the employees said a number of women are left scarred and broken by such experiences hence the need for the fostering of a healing process through the establishment of counselling services.



*“We would want the (Sexual Harassment) policy to have a counselling section where if such individuals who have been harassed can approach the company and have counselling sessions where they can be talked to, to enable healing even if the abuse occurred eight years ago.”*

She emphasised the need for past violations to be revisited so that survivors can have closure on the cases.

*“We want past injustices to be acknowledged. We want them to be resuscitated and talked about so that they may be a solution. We want a framework where those people can come and talk about their experiences without being victimized.”*

An official from the company promised that as management they will look in to the provision of psycho-social services for survivors of sexual harassment and he also urged women to speak out when they are subjected to sexual harassment.

*“A lot of our casual staff could be undergoing serious violations in terms of sexual harassment but one of our challenges is that you never get someone on the ground who stands out and says, this is what is happening.” We are also going into the setting up of support services for those that would have been subjected to sexual harassment.*





## Female staffers welcome EWF's advocacy training on eliminating sexual harassment

Emthonjeni Women's Forum partnered with one of the country's leading clothing retail chain store to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace, an area that has been under reported while in dire need of a combination of legal frameworks as well as a greater awareness.

Speaking on the side-lines of a Strategic High Level Tea Engagement a chain stores buying manager commended the initiative saying the coming on board of the women rights organisation brought in the ability for female staff members to speak out.

*"We had started conscientising our staff on sexual harassment, but the coming in of Emthonjeni Women's Forum with their advocacy training was a real game changer. When you talk about sexual harassment without being taught about it is very vague but when you are now empowered with*

*information you can confront the issues headon".*

She said since they started working with Emthonjeni Women's Forum they have seen female staffers speak out and free to express themselves. She says they will be carrying out advocacy work within the organisation, but the COVID-19 pandemic has halted their plans to train other branches countrywide. A female employee who benefitted from the training, a section manager said the programme has been an eye opener.

*"There are a lot of things that we as female employees have been taking for granted thinking that they are normal things in the workspace, but our eyes are now opened.*

*"I have not heard of people speaking out until recently, we have seen sexual harassment acts happening but no one would dare speak about it but now with the advocacy training received people should be able to come out and speak out".*

*"I am now enlightened, I did not know about sexual harassment at work and did not know how to go about it, as women there is need to support each other to fight this and this is something I learnt from the high level tea".*

## Stakeholders commit to having a stand alone sexual harassment policy.

LOCAL organisations should adhere to international and regional frameworks compelling them to put in place stand-alone Sexual Harassment Policies as part of efforts towards ending violence against women, which remains one of the greatest human rights issues globally.

This came out during a policy dialogue meeting organised by Emthonjeni Women's Forum in Bulawayo featuring several corporates who are pushing for comprehensive sexual harassment policies in their respective workspaces so that employees who would have been victimised have respite and justice.

A senior manager at a Bulawayo based

beverage manufacturing company said his company does not have a stand-alone sexual harassment policy, which has left many abused women without effective channels to report. Victims fear losing their jobs or victimisation.

*"We do not have a clear stand-alone procedure that addresses sexual harassment issues in the workplace, and I think this policy dialogue meeting will culminate in us advocating for a specific policy that addresses issues of sexual harassment."*

*"This needs our immediate action. It's a missing piece in terms of our company policies and it's needed as soon as yesterday,"*

His comments came after female staff members participating in the Policy Dialogue on Sexual Harassment Zoom meeting noted that sexual harassment is a very sensitive issue and it has its own procedure completely from the norm.

## Women call for improvement of the Labour Act



The Zimbabwean government has been called upon to improve Section 8 of the Labour Act, as part of efforts to ensure women are protected from sexual harassment in the world of work.

The call was made during a Strategic High-Level Tea Engagement involving a women's rights lobby organisation Emthonjeni Women's Forum and some of Bulawayo's leading corporates.

One of the women highlighted that:

*"You may find that what is provided in the Labour Act and what is being put into effect at your company may not be exactly the same, remember the Labour Act is only acting as a minimum position that stands to guide companies, it's not the ultimate so companies should thrive to do better".*

She said there is a need to work on the policies that govern the workplace to improve on gender issues.

*"The people who sit down to craft these policies haven't experienced what we go through as women, we are on the battlefield and we know how it feels so when we suggest changes the law works better for us,"*

She encouraged women to participate and be vocal in work meetings so that their issues are heard.

*"Women should not shy away from participating at work meetings and to also take positions in decision making bodies such as the workers committees. Workers' bodies are vibrant in influencing policy change in the workplace."*

## College Students with voice and agency towards demanding for their sexual harassment policy to be publicised



College students want tertiary institutions to readily avail every student with the Sexual Harassment Policy so that they familiarize themselves with it and not just be told about its existence during orientation week.

Some female tertiary students in Bulawayo highlighted during a High level Engagement with Emthonjeni Women Forum that they find it difficult to report Sexual Harassment because they are not familiar with the document or they are blamed for it and at times they are victimized and do not know the proper channels for reporting.

*“We want our colleges to avail every student with a simplified Sexual Harassment Policy Document so that we understand it and it should state the reporting channels and assure us that there will not be any victimization”.*

*“Such documents should also be availed on student social media platforms such as Whatsapp groups, student portals and collegewebsites.”*

Some students suggested that there should be regular trainings from organisations such as Emthonjeni Women’s Forum.

*“Such trainings have empowered us with reporting mechanisms because most of us were not aware of where to report when we have been harassed or abused.”*

## Clothing retail outlet employees empowered to speak out against sexual harassment in the workplace



Female employees can now speak out on issues concerning sexual harassment that affect them within the work space. While most women had fear towards engaging in dialogue or speaking about sexual harassment in the work place, the advocacy training and dialogues have given women confidence to speak about their circumstances and demand redress or actions towards addressing their plight.

One employee said the trainings conducted had brought massive change in the organisation as they are now aware of what sexual harassment is.

*“Sexual harassment was happening in the*

*company but since EWF started raising awareness and training women on advocacy skill, the act is now limited.”*

*“We are now aware of what constitutes sexual harassment. Previously we were not aware that acts like touching inappropriately, sexual comments were not considered as sexual harassment due to lack of knowledge. Now we know what constitutes sexual harassment and we even share the information with our male counterparts which has brought change.*

*“Man now respect us and they have changed in terms of passing sexual comments and committing all other forms of sexual harassment.*



# You have the Right to Work and Learn in an environment free of Sexual Harassment



**#BreakTheSilence #SpeakOutKhuluma #StopSexualHarassment**

# For Psycho-Social Support Services Contact

**Emthonjeni Women's Forum**

**GBV Helpline:**



**080 101 88**

**#StopGBV**

