



# Mapping Anti-Sexual Harassment and Changing Social Norms in Egypt

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## Abstract

Sexual harassment is a global problem. Based on available data, Egypt has higher than average rates of sexual harassment for the Middle East and North Africa region and many other countries in the Global South. This article explores how one organization, HarassMap, has mapped sexual harassment using crowdsourced technology, engaged in anti-sexual harassment activities and sought to change social norms to move toward an environment of zero tolerance. We highlight the evolving activism since 2010, and its respective learning, within an operational environment influenced by restrictive political, religious and socio-cultural spheres. The organization has effectively contributed to changing the public discourse and nurturing an engaged community. It has also supported the development of policies in university and private sector settings, many of which are firsts for the country. This article provides insight on how anti-sexual harassment activities can occur in challenging contexts, using crowdsourcing mapping when traditional methods are illegal or could lead to violence. We draw on these experiences to reflect on more

effective forms of support that external actors can provide within restrictive operational environments.

## **Keywords**

HarassMap; Egypt; sexual harassment, law, policy, crowdsourced mapping

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## **Introduction**

Sexual harassment is a global problem; 35% of women around the world have experienced physical or sexual violence (UN Women, 2018). While data is limited in the Middle East and North Africa, studies of surveyed women in Egypt suggest the experience of sexual harassment is very high. One study suggests that 83% of Egyptian women have experienced sexual harassment (Shoukry and Hassan, 2008). While there are laws against sexual violence, Egypt has only recently made changes to include sexual harassment within the criminal code. However, survivors who have spoken out or reported incidents to the police have often faced stigma or encountered other forms of additional harm for doing so. This article focuses on the pioneering and innovative approaches that HarassMap has taken since its founding in 2010. We analyze how the organization has confronted the challenges of anti-sexual harassment work and evaluates its experiences in seeking to change social norms. While many initiatives emerged after the 2011 revolution that aimed to make the country a safe place for all, HarassMap stands out as being a sustained effort that has contributed to significant positive change. This article assesses why and how HarassMap has been able to affect positive change in a challenging operational environment.

HarassMap was “Egypt’s first independent initiative working to counter the wide social acceptability of sexual harassment” (Kirolos, 2016, 147). The organization acted to “voice, represent and champion a social right, in this case that of being free of harassment” (Bernardi, 2017, 216). HarassMap is most well-known for its crowdsourced map that tracks incidents of sexual harassment and violence. The platform has interfaced Google Maps with text messages, mobile apps, social media and a public forum. The incidents themselves are not verified, but the submissions are assessed in terms of content as well as mapping accuracy. Reports remain anonymous to the public, but individuals who submit reports are directed to support services by the organization. Since its establishment in 2010, HarassMap has also engaged in a wide range of less well known offline activities, from street-based awareness raising to engaging university administrations and partnering with the private sector.

In conjunction with a host of efforts by other initiatives and organizations, significant positive change has occurred. The work of HarassMap shows that while it is challenging to work as a civil society organization in a restrictive and

constantly changing political, religious and socio-cultural environment, positive changes to behaviors, laws and policies regarding sexual harassment can occur with innovative and multi-faceted approaches. Skalli, in her comparative assessment of Morocco and Egypt, argues that in addition “to breaking silence, demystifying the logic of harassment and exposing state complicity against women activists, their initiatives have launched what, I believe, is an irreversible dynamic of contestation against the normalisation of gender-based violence” (2014, 256).

Drawing upon the activities and organizational development of HarassMap, this article traces the history of these changes in order to provide insight into what has been learned regarding anti-sexual harassment work and changing social norms, in using crowdsourced mapping software as well as a range of other activities. The efforts of HarassMap have contributed to changing the broader public discourse and socio-political environment wherein legal and policy changes have taken place. El-Ashmawy notes that “not only have these organizations been influential on the ground and in the streets, but they have also had some vital influence on policy making, for they incited the formation and legislation of the 2014 law that criminalizes sexual harassment for the first time in Egyptian history” (2017, 251). Another example of this is that the work of HarassMap was critical for the adoption of a policy at Cairo University (the largest public university in the Arab World), the first of its kind in the nation.

## Methods

Qualitative data was collected in May and June of 2018, in the form of individual interviews with experts, including scholars and advocates working on the international or regional level, former and current members and volunteers of HarassMap (from street-level volunteers to board members), as well as key stakeholders (e.g. academics and advocates based in Egypt who have in-depth knowledge of the subject area and/or the organization specifically). Interviews with experts were conducted before data collection for contextualization, as well as following data collection to triangulate and verify the findings. The individual interviews and meetings with former and current HarassMap members/volunteers were held in a semi-structured format, the data was documented by the authors, and its analysis formed the basis of the article.

We do not focus upon individual opinions, but develop an ‘aggregate’ narrative that emerged after speaking with a range of actors who have diverse experiences and perspectives, both temporally and contextually. This approach to presenting the findings is particularly important because HarassMap is a small organization. The positionality and/or the content or context of the quotes make it relatively easy to identify any ‘anonymous’ quotes; effectively the quotes would only be anonymous for outsiders, but for insiders, particularly HarassMap members and those who know the organization, ‘anonymity’ is not possible. We believe this is a critical ethical issue, and while recognizing the value of having more ‘voices’ to speak to political contexts and the impact of the activities, we have opted to

present the content in a collective form. We also highlight this as a critical issue of justice, whereby researchers may create significant, sometimes unrecognized, risk for research participants under the illusion of ‘anonymity’.

In addition to qualitative data collection, we also draw upon the available literature and media.<sup>1</sup> Using three search platforms (Web of Science, Google Scholar and the platform of the University of British Columbia), we identified 115 academic publications (books, articles, theses) and 70 media reports (largely from an Egyptian English daily)<sup>2</sup> that reference HarassMap in some form. The selection of academic material was comprehensive, as we sought out material from multiple platforms as well as from multiple mediums to ensure as many relevant sources were identified as possible. The academic works provided a wealth of historical data, but only a few publications offered detailed information about HarassMap, which are referenced throughout this article. Most of the academic works present a very brief summary of HarassMap, often in single paragraph or sentence. As far as we are aware, the focus of the content of this article (namely what the organization has done, why it did so, and what has been learned), has not been analyzed in a detailed fashion to-date. The media analysis is only comprehensive for one Egyptian daily, while other media sources are included as per relevance.

The media content provided historical context, as several of the current HarassMap members and many volunteers are relatively new. The media also gave the researchers specific talking points for the interviews and also worked to verify the timing and context, such as in relation to historical campaigns. The media content was not systematically reviewed in terms of the representation of the organization within the media, nor the impact that media coverage had upon public opinion. While there is some emerging work in this area (e.g. El-Ibiary, 2017), further study is needed to address these questions. The qualitative data was enhanced with a review of internal materials and HarassMap reports, capturing internal learning as well as donor reporting and public documentation.

This study is not an in-depth analysis of why sexual harassment occurs, nor why the prevalence is particularly high in Egypt. There is a myriad of theories proposed by citizens and academics for this (e.g. patriarchal structures, economic downturn and unemployment, socio-cultural phenomena, lack of legal enforcement, notions of masculinity and unrealistic social expectations, influence of media, the way individuals dress, amongst others; see Abdelmonem, 2016;

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<sup>1</sup> As of 17 May 2018, there were 458 publications referencing HarassMap, according to Google Scholar. The Web of Science database finds only three publications doing so. We attempt to bring the depth of practice-learning into the academic literature, as much of the discourse has occurred within ‘grey’ literature.

<sup>2</sup> We recognize that that this publication type is largely marketed to readers from higher economic class and with higher levels of education. We have used this media as a reference point, and not as a primary source for narrative analysis or evaluation of activities.

HarassMap, 2014; Shoukry and Hassan, 2008; Tadros, 2015, 2016). Our objective is not to assess the validity of these claims, but rather to understand how one organization has attempted to make Egypt a safer place for all people, one wherein there is no tolerance for sexual harassment.

At the time of the study, data collection regarding the impact of HarassMap on behaviors and/or public knowledge was not permitted in Egypt (more on this below). We focus on the organization and its organizational learning. While this poses a limitation in making claims about the importance and impact of the activities, we believe this approach provides useful insight on how civil society organizations operate in restrictive and challenging contexts. The activities of the organization highlight the contextual nature of the operational environment, with HarassMap having to navigate layers of governmental restrictions, societal norms, and uncertainty regarding what can and cannot be done (with missteps having serious consequences). We focus on how the organization navigated the complex working environment in seeking to eliminate sexual harassment and transform norms regarding its acceptability.

A key limitation of researching this civil society organization is that, until recently, it was not one that was regularly monitoring and evaluating its activities, as might be typical for other types of more formalized or donor-funded activities. The available data was, and continues to be, limited, which poses challenges when speaking about the impact of HarassMap activities specifically, and the organization generally. Instead, we have focused on process-oriented aspects and learning of the organization, such as the concept and use of the crowdsourced mapping tool as opposed to its impact.

In addition to not having the ability to collect data to assess impact, attribution of positive change in a complex environment is difficult to make. Many factors, as outlined in this article, contribute to change, with HarassMap playing an important, but not always central role. Often positive change is the result of an emergent critical juncture that the organization is not able to fully manufacture, but is able to engage with, or respond to, when it does emerge. In line with this understanding of impact, this article frames the ‘impact’ of HarassMap as contributions to positive change, rather than attempting to attribute change to specific actors or actions.

Lastly, we wish to acknowledge that some questions have not been grappled with in this paper. For example, we have not substantially engaged with broader literature in this work. Some of the broader questions not grappled with in this work include questions of intersectionality and who within Egyptian society is particularly vulnerable. HarassMap data does provide some insight into these questions, however, we feel these topics need to be dealt with substantially, not as side notes in a work with a different objective. Offering short notes may result in the perpetuation of stereotypes, which we wish to avoid. We hope to work on these

questions in greater detail in subsequent papers, and are open for collaboration in doing so.<sup>3</sup>

Essentially, this article acts as the groundwork or the foundation, bringing the experiences and learning of an advocacy organization in the Global South to the broader conversation. It introduces the crowdsourced mapping tool, the origin of the organization, and the campaigns – we view this as an essential first step. Having this foundation in place, the next step is taking these experiences and contextualizing them into global debates, theory, discourses and critiques. For this, we look forward to potential collaborations. The authors are working on additional, more specific topics for the future. Two of the authors are currently writing up how the crowdsourced data of HarassMap shed light on participatory methodologies, challenges notions of inclusivity. Initial progress has begun on engaging the broader literature. We hope these are first steps of a longer journey.

## Background

Although public attention to the issue was limited and revolved around high profile incidents, sexual harassment was commonly experienced before the uprisings of 2011. A study in 2008 found that 83% of surveyed Egyptian women reported being exposed to sexual harassment, while 46% of the surveyed women reported that this occurred on a daily basis (Shoukry and Hassan, 2008). Despite the frequency of its occurrence in peoples' daily lives, the issue was rarely spoken about and was not acknowledged as a problem in the public discourse. In fact, 'sexual harassment' (Arabic: *taharrush jinsi*) as a term was not widely used; instead terms specific to assault for physical violence or flirtation for non-physical forms were common. There were multiple factors contributing to this situation, amongst them included a lack of clear laws and weak enforcement of those that did exist, but also socio-cultural norms regarding masculinity as well as limited reporting of the experience of sexual harassment due to stigmatization and shame (Rizzo, Price and Meyer, 2012).

Activities regarding sexual harassment are sometimes portrayed as beginning around the time of the revolution. However, the beginnings of anti-sexual harassment activism began much earlier, following an incident known as 'Black Wednesday' (2005), which was a mass sexual assault that took place at a protest against a constitutional amendment (after a long legal battle, in 2012 the government was found culpable of these assaults; El-Ibiary, 2017). In that same year, a group of volunteers, including someone who would later cofound

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<sup>3</sup> With regard to the broader feminist and critical literatures, we wish to acknowledge and thank one of the reviewers for encouraging us to reflect on how these ideas offer insight from the Global South; extending, troubling, complicating and enriching narratives often dominated by experiences and voices from the Global North. These literatures are important. However, we are also cognizant that theorizing this task cannot be done in passing.

HarassMap, began a campaign against sexual harassment. It is notable that these activities made progress in inspiring legal change through broad public engagement between 2005 and 2008 (in 2007 the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) adopted the campaign). However, in late 2008, all public engagement activities ended, resulting in limited progress following that period of time.

The idea of using crowdsourced data and online mapping technology as a data collection mechanism and as an awareness raising tool, together with community-based work, began in 2008, when former volunteers and employees of the ECWR submitted the idea for funding to an international competition. While the proposal was not successful, it resulted in the creation of a new organization, HarassMap, which was launched in December 2010. The co-founders believed that the work of the ECWR was important, and that new laws were required, but the application of these changes required transformations to the socio-cultural acceptability of sexual harassment.

From the outset, the map was viewed as a means, not an end in and of itself. The use of crowdsourcing was viewed as an important way of engaging the broader public, providing a space for people to anonymously (so as to overcome challenges related to stigma and shame) have their voice heard, and for the organization to clearly demonstrate the extent of the problem. Changing norms, values and responsibilities necessitated multiple avenues of community engagement and mobilization, while the map acted as a source of evidence, a tool for awareness raising and dialogue creation, and it also acted as a service, as those who reported incidents were given information about legal, medical and psychological support services.

While there was a strong sentiment for volunteer-driven, bottom-up change regarding sexual harassment after its establishment in late 2010, the organization also gained popularity because of timing. The revolution of 2011 took place months after the map was launched and a spirit of volunteerism and citizen action rose to levels not recently experienced in Egyptian civil society. In addition, events that took place within, and after, the revolution, enabled HarassMap to engage in critical moments wherein sexual harassment and violence became a national concern. During the initial protest movement in early 2011 there were reports of sexual assault, including by groups of men, but this did not attract much media coverage or attention (some felt this may tarnish the image of the revolution). However, the sexual assault of journalist Lara Logan in February of 2011 attracted significant media attention and in response volunteers began seeking options for starting new initiatives regarding sexual harassment and violence.

Another key turning point that increased public engagement regarding sexual harassment and violence was the 'blue bra incident' that occurred in December 2011. Images of an unclothed woman being violently beaten by military officers went viral, sparking open conversations about sexual harassment and violence (it is worth noting that post-revolution violence was not limited to state-

sanctioned or state-sponsored acts, but included a broader array of assailants). A mass citizen movement against sexual harassment and violence followed the December 2011 event, with an estimated 10,000 people marching and proclaiming that ‘the women of Egypt are a red line’ and ‘Egypt’s women are not to be stripped’ (subsequent movements would also include ‘Egypt’s men are not to be stripped’; Tadros, 2016). The incident was covered in international media and drew the attention of politicians from around the world. During this critical period, Canada’s International Development Research Centre was a key early supporter of HarassMap, first providing funding in 2012. This support enabled the organization to hire staff for the first time, and therefore become a more planned and strategic initiative, as well as to better develop the crowdsourced tool and understand the data.

As reported incidents grew in severity and scale, sexual harassment and violence entered the public discourse in an open way that had not previously occurred: 19 women assaulted on 25 January 2013; attacks targeting women protesting sexual assault on 8 June 2013; 46 women assaulted on 30 June 2013; 80 women assaulted on 3 July 2013, and so on (Langohr, 2013). Concerns about sexual harassment and assault became so widespread that when protest movements were preparing to oust then President Muhammad Mursi, one of the key issues that occupied planners was how to prevent incidents of sexual harassment and assault. Some initiatives that emerged during the 2011-2013 period were formed with the primary objective of responding to incidents of sexual violence within protest contexts. Most of these initiatives discontinued when the mass protests ended.

In the years that followed (post 2013), the ‘mob’ sexual assaults that occurred within mass protest events declined, but everyday sexual harassment did not. In fact, many reported that in post-revolution Egypt everyday sexual harassment remained at very high levels. Studies by HarassMap confirm these experiences (HarassMap, 2014). To-date, however, much of the civil society action as well as research has presented the experiences of women as an aggregate group, however there are segments of that population that experience higher degrees of vulnerability, which highlight intersectionalities, such as between gender, identity, color and citizenship status (Logan, 2015).

## **HarassMap**

When it launched in 2010, HarassMap was an informal, volunteer collective of people brought together by the idea that if more bystanders started to take action when sexual harassment happens, a critical mass will be formed, eventually creating a social norm of zero tolerance. One of the foundational ideas driving activities was to alter the acceptability of sexual harassment, specifically by engaging bystanders to speak up and clearly convey that such actions will not be tolerated where they live, work and study, and also in the public sphere. The socio-cultural change was envisioned to occur through bottom-up action, driven by a range of community-based activities. Over time, HarassMap also engaged with



institutions, such as universities and companies, to institute policies and create units to receive reports about sexual harassment and forward these on for addressing by respective authorities. These initiatives aimed to create safe institutions where women can work and study while knowing that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. At the same time, these institutions would (re)establish the consequences for harassers, while promoting positive role models of individuals who stand up against harassers.

The activities of the organization are outlined in greater detail in the following section, however it is worth noting that the impact of the organization has resulted in international recognition, awards and support. Some of these include: World Summit Youth Award in 2011, Deutsche Welle Award for 'Best Use of Technology for Social Good' in 2012, a certificate of recognition from the American Association of Geographers, being listed on the Nominet Trust 100 (recognizing the use of digital technology to change the world for the better) in 2014 and the Local Hero Award by Deutsche Welle and Shabab Talk in 2015. Support for HarassMap work has been granted by Canada's International Development Research Centre, UN Habitat and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), amongst others; for legal reasons, some of this support came via an incubator organization that HarassMap worked with. Unique for a relatively small initiative, the impact of HarassMap has been global and has inspired and supported similar projects and movements in countries across the world: the organization has received more than 100 requests from groups seeking replication support (outlined in more detail below). The global replication of HarassMap's work is one indication of the impact it is having beyond Egypt.

At the height of its volunteer engagement, over 1,500 people were engaging in anti-sexual harassment activities as a part of HarassMap's work. The organization was, and continues to be, led by a core group of individuals, who provide leadership in specific action areas (e.g. corporate partnerships, school and university partnerships, civil society partnerships, marketing and communication). In 2014, the Ministry of Social Solidarity gave all 'informal' organizations a grace period of two months to register, and it extended this grace period a few times. Registration under Law 84/2002 presented restrictions regarding funding as well as the types of permitted activities organizations could engage in. Using this legislation, the government restricted space for civil society engagement from 2014 onward. Following 2014, HarassMap had to cut out some activities for various reasons, including the inability to fundraise and the difficulty in obtaining security permits for specific activities (e.g. permission had to be obtained to engage in any activities in the public sphere, which were routinely denied).

In 2016, the organization had to stop one of its primary and original activities – community outreach and engagement – and reduce its activism across the board (continuity of action was sought by training other initiatives to implement the work). HarassMap also kept a low profile in the media and in the public sphere. Civil society was further restricted in 2017 (Law 70/2017),

effectively giving the government the ability to close down any organization if it sees that the activities may “harm national security, public order, public morality, or public health.” The new law enables the government to monitor day-to-day activities and gives it the ability to require changes to organizational leadership appointments. The consequences of not abiding by these new limitations included imprisonment and significant fines.

Before delving into the activities of HarassMap, we also wish to acknowledge the diverse array of organizations that have been engaging with this issue, and the collaborations that have occurred. The organizational learning outlined in this paper is reflective of experiences well beyond HarassMap’s own work. As the first initiative focused solely on sexual harassment, HarassMap inspired and nurtured some of the others (e.g. volunteers moved on to found other initiatives). However, as of 2018, it is the only initiative left working solely on the issue. While not a comprehensive list, the following organizations made notable contributions to the broader societal impacts described in this article regarding changing social norms, policies and laws, each in their own way: ECWR, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), Basma Movement, Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment, Tahrir Bodyguard, Al Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, Nazra for Feminist Studies, ‘Scandalize the Harasser’, Shoft Taharosh – I Saw Harassment and Ded el-Taharrush. These initiatives and organizations played critical roles in documenting incidents and providing emergency support (see Boutros, 2017). Due to a number of reasons, most of these initiatives and organizations have since closed or had their assets frozen (of these only ECWR and EIPR remain active, neither of which are working specifically on sexual harassment).

### **Activities and learning**

The activities in this section are categorized and presented by type, rather than chronologically, as this was viewed as the most logical organizing modality given the objectives of the study. Retrospective reflections on organizational activities have the potential to lose sight of the critical importance of timing and the conditions that enabled the emergence of new sets of activities. At the same time, we also emphasize the temporal dimension as the different sets of activities are analyzed.

HarassMap's sources of information include reports from the map, data from offline activities and information from online interactions with the public (e.g. via social media platforms). This data informs HarassMap's team on emerging/changing trends; it is then curated and constructed into messages and activities by the team. The messages are assembled to form training manuals and design campaigns. The campaigns are then disseminated back to the public through the same channels from which some of the data was collected – online and offline.

The trainings manuals are used to train volunteers and other partners of the organization. In this way, the different areas of HarassMap's work feed each other. The role of HarassMap's team is primarily to manage data collection, analyze information, and present it back to the community in structured and engaging ways. We have referred to these linkages within the respective sections in an attempt to highlight these connections. Alternatively, a chronological structure could have been utilized, however we feel the activity-based structure is a more suitable way to convey the learning, as similar activities are presented together (e.g. all the campaigns together, rather than activities by year).

### ***Making the invisible, visible; changing the public discourse***

The first challenge for civil society actors engaging in anti-sexual harassment activism was to make the 'invisible' and/or ignored problem of sexual harassment, one that is visible and acknowledged. In other words, the teams of HarassMap volunteers had to publicize the problem of sexual harassment and address a range of myths regarding it. In order to shift the public discourse from one that either denied the problem or one that argued the subject was too sensitive for open discussion, new avenues for communicating the problem were required.

A 2008 publication provided evidence that sexual harassment was widespread in Egypt (Shoukry and Hassan, 2008), but that evidence did not result in changes to the public acceptability of the discussion. HarassMap utilized a different approach – one arguably less rigorous in methodology – in attempting to translate information into sustained and broad conversations about sexual harassment. When HarassMap launched, the first objective was behavior change communication, as there “was still widespread disbelief and non-acceptance that *taharrush ginsy* [sexual harassment] was a real phenomenon in Egypt” (Abdelmonem, 2016, 81). There was an explicit effort to translate new knowledge and attitudes into changed behaviors. The crowdsourced map, with specific narratives and geospatial information, provided a visual tool that people could relate to. Using data to demonstrate the gravity of the issue “stories become sets of machine-readable data and re-emerge in the form of a human-understandable set of visual elements that can bring the victim to the fore and show places, reports and statistics” (Bernardi, 2017, 219).

For HarassMap, in “order to end the social acceptability of sexual harassment... all members of society need to take on personal responsibility for speaking up against the practice, especially those on the sidelines who ignore or watch sexual harassment incidents but do nothing” (Abdelmonem, 2015, 105). The innovative nature of the map drew national and international attention to the issue, and in doing so helped to make the invisible visible. The “online tool gives women a voice, allowing them to effectively contribute and receive information, starting a community dialogue about the problem” (Cattle, 2016, 437). Tadros concludes that “very rarely do people today deny the occurrence or say it is something socially

unacceptable to talk about” (2015, 16). This is the breaking of the silence that Skalli (2014) argues results in irreversible social change.

As per the experts we interviewed, the map was successful as a communication tool as well as a service in and of itself. The anonymous platform provided a way for survivors to voice their experiences and frustration, documenting and mapping incidents of harassment. While this did not lead to a rise in official reporting per se, it was important in conveying the extent of the problem in the socio-cultural realm. Consistently low reporting (3% in 2008: Shoukry and Hassan, 2008; 2% in 2014: Fahmy et al, 2014) occurred within the socio-cultural environment where speaking about such an experience may result in additional harm for the survivor. In the political and legal realms, silence on the topic was perpetuated by a lack of reporting sexual harassment to the different channels available. Reporting to the police is the most conventional way to report; however, administrative and social barriers compromise women's access to justice in sexual harassment and sexual violence crimes in general. While there was a need for a greater ability to report as well as better mechanisms to support survivors, there was also a need for improved access to information about how to report, including guidance regarding how to make a police report, guidelines on how to intervene when witnessing sexual harassment and how to respond to harassers.

The map provided an avenue for people who were prevented from approaching formal channels of justice, for a diverse range of reasons. To address these information access barriers, after posting the information on a map, survivors received information from HarassMap about where to access free services, such as legal aid, medical support, how to file a police report, psychological support and self-defence classes. Due to recent legal changes regarding data collection, and uncertainty about where crowdsourcing fits within that, HarassMap has decreased its promotion of the map and as a result it has seen a decline in contributions.

### ***Campaigns***

The map was never thought of as the primary activity for the organization, and reports on the map are still relatively limited given that nearly half of all Egyptian women experience sexual harassment on a daily basis (Shoukry and Hassan, 2008). Instead, the map was a tool as well as a means to enable other forms of activities. According to former and current staff and volunteers, the information provided from the map inspired new forms of activism and continues to do so.

The content of reports on the map provided invaluable information to be used in other activities, such as campaigns. For instance, one of HarassMap's campaigns aimed to challenge the justifications of sexual harassment, which was inspired by information collected from the map. The team summarized the common justifications used and then returned to the map for evidence to challenge them. For example, if the justification suggests that 'a person harasses because of

sexual frustration' the team pulled reports from the map that recounted harassment incidents by young children. Similarly, the justification of 'late marriage leads to sexual harassment' was challenged by map reports indicating that married men were reported as harassers. Young argues that the “visual representation of crowd-sourced data has a positive impact on the usability and consumption of data among stakeholders, thereby improving the effectiveness of HarassMap’s offline programming” (Young, 2014, 9).

As these multiple uses of the map data demonstrate, it was not only the map’s usability and consumption by external actors, but the map itself was also extremely important for the organization’s objective. The range of topics addressed in the public campaigns (see Table 1), are reflective of how the organization was able to use the map as a way to learn and engage with the public and ensure its communication was relevant, suitable and appropriate. However, campaigns are not perfect, and the organization learned from each campaign. Although it did not have a formal organizational learning mechanism, the public engagement (including the map, but also other forms) provided immediate feedback mechanisms. The lessons learned from these campaigns highlight how the organization has been flexible in being able to respond, adapt and learn following each campaign.

**Table 1. HarassMap Campaigns and Lessons Learned**

| Year (launch) | Campaign   | Target Audience  | Lessons  |
|---------------|--|------------------|--|
| 2013          | 'Why Does He Harass' (The Myths Campaign)          | Bystanders       | Need to address the common justifications and excuses for sexual harassment directly.  |
| 2013          | 'Get It Right' campaign (by a coalition of actors) | Society at large | The list of reasons and excuses for harassment is endless. Work on the root causes of power dynamics and patriarchal structures. Clarify terminology and avoid negative portrayals of men, such as depicting men as animals (this can normalize harassing behaviors and be used as an excuse). |
| 2014          | 'I Will Not Be Silent'                             | Survivors        | It is important that women and girls act as active bystanders for their own empowerment and as a means to shift power dynamics.  |
| 2015          | 'We Want A Policy'                                 | University       | Both top-down and  |

| Year (launch) | Campaign  | Target Audience  | Lessons  |
|---------------|---|------------------|--|
|               | (University campaign)                             | Administration   | bottom-up approaches are needed for developing an anti-harassment policy on campus. Having champions within institutions is critical. The role of media in influencing decision makers following well-known incidents can advance implementation and approval of policies. |
| 2015          | 'Harasser = Criminal'                             | Society at large | Windows of opportunity (new law) result in high engagement. A legal focus raises concerns about demonizing when shifting stigma from survivors to assailants.  |
| 2015          | How to Report                                     | Survivors        | In order to enable changes to the environment where more reporting takes place, individuals need to know what information is useful / needed (particularly in a system of justice when things are not always clear).   |
| 2015          | This is not a Flirtation, it is sexual harassment | Society at large | In order to raise awareness with the public, personal connections must be made with those who experience harassment.   |
| 2016          | Types of Sexual Harassment                        | Society at large | Not all non-physical forms of sexual harassment are recognized as being harassment, clear examples help broaden understanding.   |
| 2016          | Workplace Policy Inquiry                          | Women            | It is challenging to deal with corporate mentalities. Change the language used with businesses to get them on board.   |

| Year (launch) | Campaign                   | Target Audience  | Lessons   |
|---------------|----------------------------|------------------|---|
| 2017          | ‘Who Doesn’t Get Harassed’ | Society at large | Moving beyond binaries requires engaging intersectionality.   |
| 2018          | Consent Campaign           | Society at large | Introduce the concept of consent into the discourse to address the on-going question about the difference between flirting and harassment, and who decides whether an act is harassment or not, need to be addressed with clarity of examples and language use. |

The campaigns have been shared via social media platforms as well as in posters, television ads, on handbags, as graffiti, and in other art forms. Each was designed to target specific issues, often occurring in moments of time wherein those particular discussions were prioritized or pertinent. The ‘myths campaign’, for example, set out to address some of the most common justifications or excuses for sexual harassment, which was a first step required once the issue had become more openly discussed. The campaign directly addressed common justifications and misconceptions by asking thought provoking questions, such as: If harassment



From top left to bottom right:

*If harassment is caused by poverty, why would the company manager harass?*

*If harassment is caused by illiteracy, why would the teacher harass?*

*If harassment is caused by the delayed marriage age, why would the father of the children harass?*

*If harassment is caused by sexual repression, why would the seven year old harass?*

is because how women dress, why are veiled women harassed? (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Example from the ‘Myths Campaign’

Other campaigns were enabled by a deep public engagement, such as more recent campaigns about consent.

Another campaign sought to address linguistic challenges. The vagueness that surrounded the differences between the commonly used *mu'aksa* (flirtation) and *taharrush* (harassment) and *taharrush jinsi* (sexual harassment) were critical. The organization needed to change the linguistic landscape to ensure a degree of mutual understandability about what was said, and what was meant. This also included differentiating the use of other, more specific terms, such as *atadai al-jinsy* (sexual assault), *al-unf al-jinsy* (sexual violence) and *htk' ird* (indecent assault). Questions about what constitutes sexual harassment have continued to arise, and require on-going engagement. HarassMap spent years refining how its own communication worked to ensure greater clarity. As the public conversation about sexual harassment continues, new linguistic challenges arise. For example, when the 2018 campaign on consent was being planned, the organization had to grapple with regional dialects having different terms for consent, each with slightly different implications and connotations.

The campaign that garnered the most attention, and was most heavily invested in by HarassMap, was the 'Harasser = Criminal' campaign (see Table 2). In this instance, a window of opportunity emerged as a new law had recently been passed (2014), adding sexual harassment explicitly to the criminal code, and outlining minimum punishments. External changes, such as this legal one, are examples of how organizations like HarassMap cannot manufacture critical junctures wherein significant opportunities for change exist, however they need to be ready and resourced to be able to take advantage of them. As Tadros notes, a "number of enabling factors such as the media, the issuance of a new law, and initiatives such as Harassmap, Imprint, and many others have played a major contributing role to breaking the silence around the occurrence of sexual harassment" (2015, 19). It has often been the confluence of these enabling factors that have allowed for significant change to occur.

**Table 2. Reach of 'Harasser = Criminal' campaign**

|                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Re-Tweet reach                   | 2,600,000+ |
| Facebook reach                   | 200,000    |
| YouTube impressions              | 2,300,000+ |
| Printed poster distributed       | 8,000+     |
| Television ad reach (estimation) | 250,000+   |

Given the diversity of campaigns over time, both in content and in format, the organization has also learned which media tools to use and how to best use them. Part of the reason the 'Harasser = Criminal' campaign had such a wide reach was that it had funding to support design and promotion. In many other instances, when funding was limited, the organization opted to use the tools available to them, often focusing upon lower cost social media engagement. Situational choices



regarding media use were influenced by other factors as well, such as printed content being used more widely when the dissemination potential was great with large numbers of volunteers doing street campaigns. However, a former Executive Director felt that social media was emerging as the most effective form of engagement, as it enabled the organization to engage with relevant issues in a timely fashion. For example, in response to popular television dramas during Ramadan, a printed campaign or television ad might take months to prepare, design and implement, but social media engagement can be done immediately.

Tapping into current discussions and engaged audiences enables the organization to obtain a high level of engagement with timely and relatable content. Social media is also interactive, allowing for two-way conversations, as opposed to one-way information dissemination modalities of other media forms. However, social media also presents limitations, such as the limited audiences (tending to be younger, urban and of relatively higher socio-economic status, and that algorithms shape viewership). The organization continues to grapple with some the negative implication of their 'reach' if they focus on social media. Particularly in an environment where public activities are effectively barred, a high degree of responsiveness and flexibility are required.

### ***Training***

HarassMap volunteers and members have provided training in a wide range of settings and for diverse purposes. At the outset, training was primarily geared toward community-based volunteers, who would then lead their own sub-teams of volunteers for street-based engagement. These volunteer teams would speak with people in public settings and encourage shopkeepers and businesses to become safe spaces while at the same time probing them on their views on sexual harassment and assessing likelihood of change. While these processes were not easy, "it was in the iterative process of doing intervention (on the streets), then sharing, debating and reflecting, that opportunities for sustained transformations occurred" (Tadros, 2015, 15).

The hundreds of volunteers that have supported HarassMap over the years have primarily done so via these street-based activities. This engagement was an invaluable source of information for HarassMap as it responded to changing trends, emerging justifications for sexual harassment, and provided innovative ways of responding. For instance, through outreach activities, HarassMap learned that 'eating in the street' was a new excuse for sexual harassment as 'women who eat in public were asking for it'.<sup>1</sup> Having people engage in the public sphere allowed these justifications to be heard, and then challenged. However, measuring the extent of creating a critical mass in a given area was remarkably challenging, as would be expected from any assessment of behavioral change in a context of limited resources and restrictions on data collection, but particularly so in Egypt where such data collection required permission, which was routinely denied.

After the legal challenges in 2014, the organization had to reduce street-based activism (all street-based activities had to be stopped in 2016), and thus also its approach to training. Responding to the changing political and legal environment required a high degree of organizational flexibility. HarassMap thereafter directed all of the training and volunteer management resources toward university campuses and community partnerships with other grassroots organizations. The organization is currently working with ten universities in Egypt (see more below). Students raise awareness in self-run groups, while faculty and administrators work to develop new policies and establish units within the university to implement the policy – these units are to receive and investigate sexual harassment reports.

In addition to universities, HarassMap members have trained media professionals – from journalists to graduate media students - in an effort to change the media landscape and media coverage of sexual harassment. Another example of new forms of training the organization has provided is to other service providers, such as civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, with the aim of mainstreaming sexual harassment in the work of organizations engaged with various social issues and with different vulnerable groups. While these new forms of training are important, they are also one of the few spaces that the organization has been granted opportunities to work. The context of political restriction is critical, as the organization did not opt for these as first-choice activities, but rather as necessary choices, given no other options. Effectively, they are working where they can. The implications of these forms of gendered, institutional and socio-political constraints of the work requires additional research and reflection, which is beyond the scope of our current objectives.

In the early years of street activism, volunteers sought to work with local businesses to become safe spaces. More recently, HarassMap has been engaging larger corporations. For example, in 2015 a partnership was developed with Uber in Egypt, whereby its staff were given training. In the future, Uber drivers will be reached with a video and quiz as well as an audio production presented on the company's channel alongside other required organizational audios, such as updates on legal changes. This content has the potential to reach an estimated 50,000 Uber drivers in Egypt.

In another instance, a construction company was required to have sexual harassment training as part of a USAID contractual requirement. However, once training was provided to technicians, management also took an interest and requested training as well, as it sought to understand challenges related to high turnover of female staff. This shows how international actors, which may not have direct influence over policy or law (or enforcement thereof) can affect change through other entry points if their engagement is contextually informed. Training workshops are one means of “how HarassMap staff and volunteers serve as important mediators and translators of norms and values circulating into and within

Egyptian society” (Abdelmonem, 2016: 122) and attempt to create constructive discussion spaces regarding the issue in diverse spaces.

### *Changes to law and policy*

Governmental changes since 2010 have presented two, somewhat contradictory, experiences for HarassMap. On the one hand, the operational environment for civil society organizations has been severely restricted; effectively closing many organizations and curtailing the activities of all others. On the other hand, however, there have been positive legal changes regarding sexual harassment. A new draft law was proposed by the Task Force for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in 2012, but was not approved due to regime changes. In May of 2013, a Violence Against Women Department was created within the Ministry of Interior and in June 2014 sexual harassment was criminalized in the Penal Code (Kirolos, 2016). In the following year, a national strategy to combat violence against women was adopted under the National Council for Women (Kirolos, 2016), which included increased policing in hotspot areas, followed by an increase of arrests and convictions (Bernardi, 2017; Sepulveda, 2015). The National Council for Women and the Ministry of Interior have been inviting civil society groups to provide input in addressing sexual harassment (Tadros, 2015, 21), although there are questions about the sincerity of these calls (see Abd El-Hameed, 2013; Abdel Rahim and Fracolli, 2016). While these changes are positive, they ought to also be viewed as attempts of governmental agencies to control or co-opt civil society.

Bottom-up community mobilization was one of the first activities to be undertaken at HarassMap, despite some occasional changes in strategy. It was several years later that the organization began to also work in a top-down way alongside its bottom-up approaches. Activities of this nature took time to develop. One of the key focus areas was volunteer recruitment on university campuses, which was very promising from the start not only because youth tend to be enthusiastic and hopeful, but also because shifts in culture are easier to engage with in a contained physical space. The team started a partnership with Cairo University, at the outset developing alliances with feminist professors who supported the objective. Student teams received training and disseminated HarassMap's campaigns, in addition to later having campaigns designed specifically for universities. On-campus volunteers were actively raising awareness against sexual harassment on the student level, while professors were lobbying for a policy on the administrative level.

As a part of its university-based work, HarassMap began working with administrators and faculty to advocate for the creation of units that would handle reports of sexual harassment within the university and support the development of policies regarding it. To varying degrees of progress, this is occurring at ten universities in Egypt, with Cairo University being the most successful. In fact, the policy at Cairo University was the first such university policy in the country.

However, the emergence of this change was not due to the slow building of support or progressive changing of attitudes. Rather, it was its ability to engage within a critical juncture having the necessary capacity in place.

The moment of change took place after a widely reported incident of sexual harassment occurred on campus. The initial response of the universities authorities replicated justifications, resulting in formal and informal pressure for a more appropriate response. Thereafter, HarassMap volunteers were well positioned to advocate for the development of a policy, the establishment of a unit and the resourcing of it. These top-down, institutional changes had positive impacts on the bottom-up work of the organization, at least on campus. The administrative and policy changes at Cairo University enabled student awareness raising efforts to gain in confidence and backing. Effectively, having the combination of high-level support and student-activism has fostered a positive enabling environment for change, which together provided the capacity to respond to critical junctures and push for change.

As Abdelmonem describes, HarassMap initially was driven by a theory of change that was entirely bottom-up and focused explicitly on bystander engagement. This process, she argues, would “challenge and refashion long-held norms that make sexual harassment socially acceptable” (2015, 95). Afterwards, in this vision for change, a sufficient segment of society would demand political and legal change to align with their emerging social norms. Influenced both by its organizational learning and shifts in the socio-political sphere, HarassMap began to also engage in top-down change, such as the university and corporate activities, as their ability to conduct street-based activity remained severely restricted (effectively prohibited).

While the top-down processes were not planned from the outset, it reflects the ability of the organization to adapt the mission and objectives of work based on emerging needs and changing circumstances. Having the combination of top-down and bottom-up pressure for change has proved to be effective and has opened new avenues for engagement, such as establishing more private sector partnerships. As the organization learns from its work, and responds to changing operational spaces, it has become highly adaptive. While responding to opportunities and constraints is important, a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness also poses a challenge: the organization is pushed by external shifts rather than strategic action. How HarassMap grapples with this question is returned to in the final section of the article.

### *Inspiring movements*

The success of HarassMap is not limited to Egypt. Since the launch of the map there have been individuals, groups and organizations from around the world seeking to replicate the crowdsourced map and explore how they might engage in similar activities. Some of these initiatives also created maps, others have not,

opting for different forms of engagement. A few of these movements have been highly successful, while others have remained as ideas.

Our focus here is not the impact of particular movements per se, but the way in which HarassMap has inspired movements around the world, as per the experts from whom data was collected. Since the creation of the map, this has also been an area that HarassMap has invested in: the broader global struggle. Co-founder Rebecca Chiao has supported teams seeking to replicate and adapt the HarassMap model in places such as Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Pakistan, Turkey, India and Indonesia and has coached over 100 different groups (Abdelmonem, 2016). The global support and replication efforts are on-going and HarassMap continues to receive inquiries and requests for guidance and support. The new web platform upon which HarassMap operates (for the crowdsourced data collection) has been made freely available for all others to utilize and adapt. In 2018, similar maps in South Africa and in Turkey launched.

### ***Enabling research***

There are hundreds of publications that reference HarassMap, most of which point to it as a modality of using information communication technologies and crowdsourced data for social change. One of the most important research initiatives led by HarassMap was a qualitative and quantitative study to assess the accuracy of crowdsourced data (HarassMap, 2014). While specific to sexual harassment in Egypt, the research helped to deepen broader understandings of the effectiveness and validity of crowdsourced data. While there are limitations to crowdsourced data, and specifically the modality used by HarassMap, the offline quantitative and qualitative study found “that the Map is an effective tool for data collection for sensitive issues” (HarassMap, 2014, vi). By demonstrating that survey results from crowd-sourced data were very similar to face-to-face survey results, HarassMap presented external validity of crowdsourced data, as well as a methodology of how that can be established.

In so doing, HarassMap has inspired new research directions. For example, Mohamed and Van Nes (2017) utilized HarassMap’s geospatial data to identify areas where sexual harassment is more frequent, conduct location-based analysis from an urban planning perspective, and recommend options for creating safer spaces in urban Egypt. Other researchers have used this data to inform their work. For example, Henry (2017) utilized the data to inform research site selection. The new research is not only external. The organization has used the data to engage in unplanned and unanticipated research, most recently, the team has begun research on masculinities and media monitoring to better understand the broader environment that influences decision making.

### **Discussion**

There is widespread recognition that the operational space for civil society in Egypt is limited by the state, which oscillates in its tolerance, co-option and

repression of activism. This has multiple implications. One implication is that there is a need for contextualization regarding what can and cannot be safely done and when, as well as critical reflection on what is and is not considered 'political' in nature. We believe that the experience of HarassMap provides important insight into broader, global discussions, and present this article as the groundwork for enabling future work that may extend, trouble, complicate and enrich existing works within feminist literatures.

Another implication is that it ought to be expected that activities, particularly community-based work, may change over time (from active to latent periods) in response to changing political and social environments. In 2018, activists in Egypt experienced an oscillation to repression. Alternatively, in 2014, there were new opportunity spaces as the government passed new laws against sexual harassment and established a new police unit to address sexual harassment, which enabled opportunities for collaboration with civil society. Also in 2014, a national strategy to combat violence against women was finalized by the National Council of Women. Similarly, in 2015, HarassMap was permitted by the Governor of Alexandria to do community outreach work in the transit system around a festival date, but were not granted approval to do the same in public spaces (which required approval from the Ministry of Interior).

Due to shifts in the political sphere, it ought to be expected that civil society organizations such as HarassMap have moments when they move into latent periods, at least in the public sphere. In these times, however, the organization has to continue to maintain its capacity and readiness. This includes engaging in those activities that are permitted, innovating and ensuring the public remains aware of the organization and its activities. Internally, the organization needs to have the resources to prepare for windows of opportunity wherein public activities can be re-initiated when a window of opportunity opens.

For external supporters and donors of groups like HarassMap, understanding this operational context and flexibility is key, lest organizations be expected to operate as if the political environment allowed for consistent, lineal positive change. A key success factor from the Ethiopian Womens Lawyers Association, which successfully advocated for the change of multiple discriminatory laws in Ethiopia, was that donor support was given in the form of core organizational support, rather than being tied to specific projects and activities that must be reported upon within set timeframes (Cochrane and Birhanu, 2018). In the Ethiopian case, this funding approach gave the organization the ability to respond to changing political dynamics as well as respond to emergent windows of opportunity. Akin to other examples of collective action, the anti-sexual harassment work undertaken in Egypt does not align with the donor or project cycle, nor the NGOization of short-term targets with predictable, measurable outcomes (Kabeer, Milward and Sudarshan 2013, 43-44). Realistic expectations within agreements should recognize the cycles of political change and the resultant windows of opportunities. In agreement with Andrea Cornwall, we see "the most

important role for external actors – funders, as well as facilitators – is that of supportive accompaniment” (Cornwall, 2013, xi). Enabling the actors and activists who are most familiar with risks and opportunities to lead decision making.

### **Future directions**

Despite new laws, strategies, media engagement and public awareness, women in Egypt continue to experience sexual harassment at extremely high levels. Changing norms and behaviors in society is a long-term task, and the goals of HarassMap cannot be achieved through short term activities. As the organization looks to the future, it is broadening its engagement space, analyzing the ecosystem that influences sexual harassment and identifying key entry points (Saleh, 2017). In navigating these decisions, the single greatest limitation it faces is the restriction of civil society, and thus their ability to work. This includes restrictions on funding, the requirement of permits for research or public activities, and the potential of the government to regulate organizational direction and leadership (Zeid, 2017).

As a result of changes to the operational environment and uncertainty about where to focus efforts, the organization has begun revising its theory of change. The history of the organization has enabled it to become more aware of the complications and intersectionality of sexual harassment, patriarchal structures, power dynamics and gender-based violence. This has facilitated taking the discussion spaces that HarassMap opens with the public to engage with these deeper layers. HarassMap thinks of sexual harassment not in a vacuum, but within the broader umbrella of gender-based violence, gender equality and human rights. A focus on bystanders’ intervention for ending sexual harassment was not meeting these goals and the emergent lessons indicated that its needed to broaden its scope (which had effectively already occurred in its shifting activities). HarassMap has been quite flexible in its activities throughout the years and has been willing to change programs or introduce new ones. For instance, on multiple occasions over the years, staff members have felt that messaging can be alienating to men and counter-productive, resulting in the team running a few projects related to male engagement. This flexibility, however, needs to be better aligned with, and reflected in, an updated theory of change.

From the stage of breaking the silence and creating the irreversible dynamic of contestation against the normalisation of sexual harassment, the steps forward of HarassMap will be adapting the change they want to make and the way they can contribute to it, based on the emergent context of public discourse and government regulation. New approaches of tackling masculinities/femininities, consent, and power dynamics are examples of this. One of the major shifts the organization is considering is a more participatory approach in creating knowledge with the public. HarassMap previously depended on providing an open knowledge source around sexual harassment to the public, and delivering this knowledge in their trainings. However, the team started to realize the importance of co-creating knowledge with the public to reduce the resistance and create two-way conversations with the

public (moving beyond the provision of information). To support this, a knowledge production unit is being established within the HarassMap structure to keep up with the latest debates and discourses of sexual harassment and the intersectional layers of gender-based violence. Moreover, this unit will be responsible for shaping a participatory approach and participatory methodologies for co-creating knowledge with stakeholders and the public.

HarassMap's future direction includes re-establishing closer and direct relationships with their social base offline. They want to carry out joint and long-term activities with initiatives, CSOs and NGOs. The challenge for HarassMap work will be measuring the effect and the contribution of their work to their desired social change. Nonetheless, they are planning to build the capacities of the actors involved, and deepen their use of monitoring and evaluation tools. This includes establishing a stronger system to facilitate their documentation and reflection process on their daily activities and how it is linked to their objectives and mission. Due to legal changes, all data collection in Egypt has to be approved, and as a result the future of the open, on-going anonymous crowdsourced reporting via the map and social media is uncertain.

One challenge for HarassMap is to have a message that fits their wide range of audiences. For example, working with corporate entities requires them to think about the profitable economic side which would encourage corporations to be a safer place for their employees. Approaching corporations from a social responsibility prospective is often not enough. Thus, HarassMap may expand their services and cooperation with companies to include combating any kind of gender-based violence or discrimination that these companies might need to tackle.

The on-going changes will have impacts on their objectives and mission as well as requiring them to develop clear pathways toward achieving the desired changes. What this looks like is uncertain, but given the adaptability of the organization in the past, there are positive signs it will continue to navigate these challenges. HarassMap has undergone dynamic changes over the years for both external and internal factors. The permanent and most challenging factor is the operational space influenced by the political sphere and the fragile context in which they operate. The constant uncertainty due to legal amendments and vague implications give the organization limited time for reflecting and learning about their daily work, which affects their organizational growth and long-term plans. Nevertheless, HarassMap continues to try to develop innovative approaches regarding combating sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence.

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### Conflict of interest

The views expressed in this work are those of the creators and do not necessarily represent those of the International Development Research Centre or its Board of Governors and are not attributable to it as an organization.

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