

The "TALKING BOXES" *of* Kibera



An Evidence Report



*Breaking the silence on sexual
harassment & abuse of school girls*



“For a long time, I had no-one to talk to and bottled up my issues. But when the talking box was introduced in our school, I was able to speak out by writing on a piece of paper and depositing it into the box, without having to reveal my identity,”

11-year-old girl on the “Talking Boxes” of Kibera

Confidentiality:

Whilst the content of this report has been gathered largely from the outcomes of the “Talking Boxes” project, Polycom Development Project emphasizes total confidentiality of information presented in the boxes as well as the uttermost protection of identity and dignity. All personal information on the girls as originally presented has been removed for this assurance.

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About Polycom Development Project

The Polycom Development project is an innovation driven women empowerment and girl-child welfare organization, working to develop the capacities of women and girls from the slums to take charge of their lives and manage it positively.

Vision

A country where there are empowered, liberated and confident women contributing effectively to the development of their communities and the country at large

Mission

To empower adolescent girls in Kibera through access to education, sports activities, and sanitation to be able to manage their lives positively and develop a voice to influence policy and decision makers on issues that affect their lives.

Geographical Location

Polycom Development Project operates in diverse informal settlements in Kenya officially referred to as “slums”.

In Nairobi, the organization works in *Mathare, Mukuru, Kiambiu, Kibera and Korogocho*. Polycom Development Project also operates beyond Nairobi in the cities of Mombasa and Kisumu working with two slum areas in each location. In *Homa Bay County*, the organization works with the rural community to map and mitigate the effects of quarries on women and girls through engaging organized groups and institutions.

Glossary



- Adolescent Girl:** A girl typically between the ages of 11 and 18. Polycom's target group consists mostly of girls between the ages of 12 and 16.
- Informal Settlements:** These are unplanned settlements and areas which are constructed outside of planning regulations, usually in response to a population surge in a town or city that cannot be accommodated by formal housing. Inhabitants often have no security of tenure for the land or dwellings they inhabit, and local authorities and security personnel do not maintain the rule of law within.
- Matatu:** Public transport vehicles in Kenya which are owned by individuals and managed through structured companies.
- Sexual Abuse:** Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. Sexual Harassment: unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.
- Talking Boxes:** A confidential box strategically located in schools and recently in the community for collection of notes with issues affecting Adolescent girls and boys in the society.
- Young Woman:** A woman between the ages of 18 and 30, as defined by United Nations.

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Appreciation

Polycom Development Project of Kibera is entirely grateful to **Womankind Worldwide** for the partnership in the production of this Evidence Report.

We are extremely thankful that **Womankind Worldwide** supported us to give voice to the lamentations from our “Talking Boxes” project and contribute greatly towards breaking the silence in the cycle of violence and abuse meted upon adolescent girls and women of Kibera.



We are very grateful to UNFPA Kenya team under the leadership of Dr. Ademola Olajide for their unwavering support that scaled up Talking Boxes to 50 schools from the initial 15 schools, and for enabling us to respond to the issues raised through the **Talking Boxes** and to mentor over 3000 adolescent girls annually on Sexual Reproductive Health and Life skills.

Much appreciation to Vital Voices/ Red Dot Foundation for their guidance on how to create visuals of various forms of sexual harassment and how to digitize the contents, and further engage with various stakeholders. Your contributions have given this policy power to be heard in Kenya and beyond.

Polycom is thankful for the unwavering support and cooperation of school management and staff who invited us to their schools, listened and agreed to partner with us for the installation and operationalization of the “**Talking Boxes**”. This is the ultimate support that was needed in amplifying the voices of the girls at risk of sexual harassment and sexual abuse.

We are grateful to guidance from the girls to strategically place the talking boxes in areas where girls consider safe and easy to access including in the girl’s toilets. This strategy limits data from boys however, the project has been engaging boys by educating them and equipping them with life skills.

Lastly and profoundly, we are hugely indebted to the **young adolescent girls and boys from our target schools** who continue to breathe life into the “**Talking Boxes**” and tell their stories. It is not only their pleas and cries for help but their bravery in breaking their silence through this method which has made the compilation of this document a possibility. SILENCE is the number one deterrent to stamping out sexual harassment and abuse of Adolescent girls and Adolescent boys. **Your voices are a lethal weapon against abuse, so keep speaking out!**

The compilation and production of this Policy Evidence Report has been completed by Gender & Communications Expert (*Mildred Ngesa*), Monitoring and evaluation Specialist (*Patrick Angala*), a gender champion (*Anne Agar*) and (*Elizabeth Apondi*) with support from Polycom Development Project and Womankind Worldwide.

Jane Anyango - *Founder/Director*



1. Executive Summary

Breaking the silence is critical in addressing and ending sexual harassment & abuse of adolescent girls

Despite the existence of **The Sexual Offences Act 2016**¹, it is the recommendation of this Evidence Report that the Kenyan government and law enforcement agencies operationalize the act to ensure its efficacy. It defeats the purpose of having a strict law if it only exists on paper. This report therefore recommends more stringent action from the Kenyan Police on cases of sexual harassment and sexual abuse, as well as greater accountability from judicial officers and paralegals in following up on cases.

This Policy Evidence Report brings into focus the reality of the devastating ravages of sexual harassment and abuse meted out against Adolescent girls and children from Kibera. Data from the Talking Boxes at the 20 supported schools indicates that 19% (564) of the 3,021 notes shared were related to sexual harassment and abuse. It shows the urgency for intervention, and need for the streamlining of justice and safety mechanisms to ensure that girls are protected.

This report calls on duty bearers who include the Kenyan Police, County, Sub county, village administration officers, the judiciary and stakeholders to take up their responsibilities and close the gap for offenders.

This report also recommends an active, vigilant and proactive education safety mechanism in schools for children, especially adolescent girls from vulnerable communities. It is paramount that the needs, fears of, and threats to adolescent

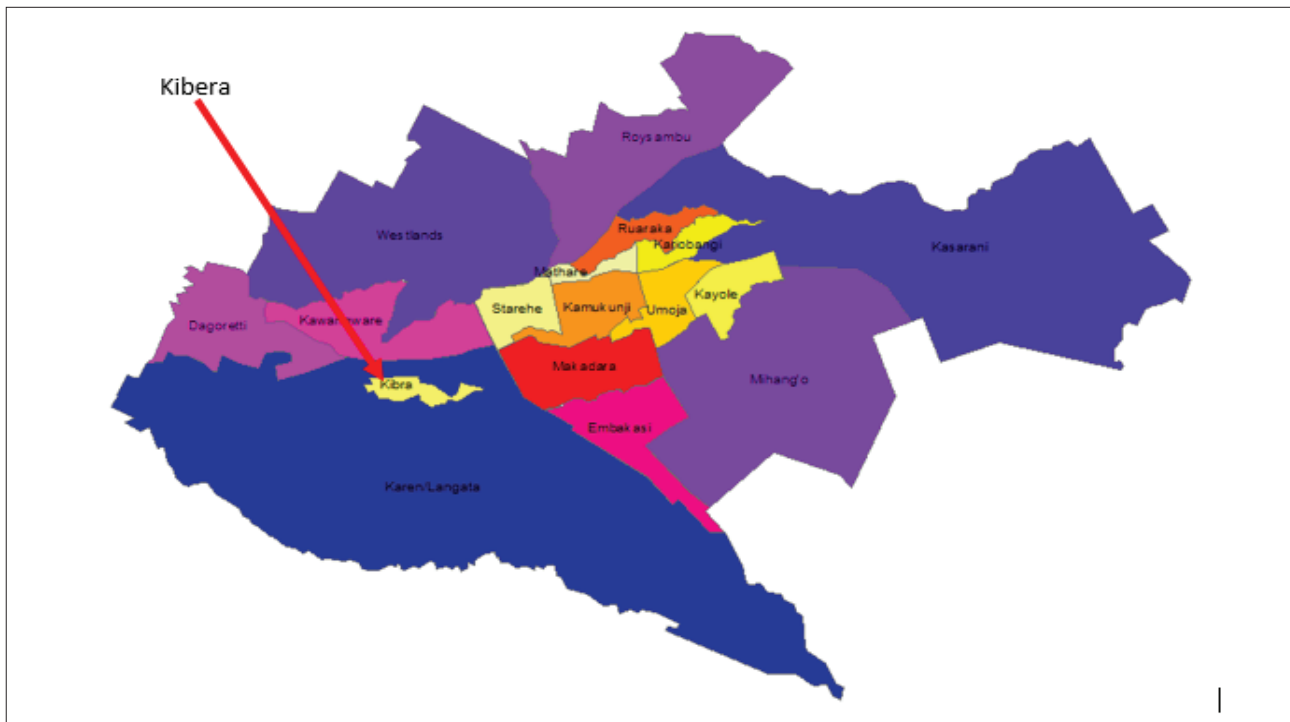
girls in education becomes a priority for our schools' system, the teaching staff and within school governance processes. For the many adolescent girls who are at risk of sexual harassment and abuse in their homes, schools become their shelter. However, and ironically to some, even in school the threats of sexual harassment and abuse still persist.

It is also the duty of the community at large: the community-based workers, civil society, and community mobilisers, to be alert to the fact that girls are vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuses **everywhere**. Only in this way, will we be able to form a protective shield that looks out for the safety and wellness of our girls, and in turn remand perpetrators for prosecution as a deterrent to sexual harassment and sexual abuse.

This Evidence Report de-bunks social norms that protect perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse. The report instigates behavior change that would decrease the risk to adolescent girls from perpetrators. Whilst it may be the first Evidence report pushing forth the findings of the "Talking Boxes", it will not be the last.

The **"Talking Boxes"** could be the only platform of breaking the silence on sexual harassment and abuse for adolescent girls, therefore it is our intention as Polycorn Development Project to implement our **"Talking boxes"** beyond Kibera as it is imperative that these safe spaces are available for adolescent girls.

¹ http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/bills/2016/TheSexualOffences_Amendment_Bill__2016.pdf



Sexual harassment is the most extreme

The current reality in Kenya, and Worldwide, is that sexual violence disproportionately affects women and girls.⁶ Wherever sexual violence occurs, it is a major obstacle for

⁶ Abuya et al., 2012, Educational challenges and diminishing family safety net faced by high-school girls in a slum residence, Nairobi, Kenya. International Journal of Educational Development.

the achievement of gender justice, posing a serious threat to democratic social, and career development⁷, as well as public health, and is a critical barrier to achieving sustainable development, economic growth, peace and disrupts social association.⁸

Polycom Development Project took action to break the silence on sexual harassment and abuse on girls in schools within the sprawling Kibera informal settlement of Nairobi. The conceptualization and implementation of the "Talking Boxes Project" by Polycom Development project in 2011 has paved the way to breaking the silence and stamping on violations long thriving within communities and impacting harshly on the lives of Women and girls in Kibera. Through installing confidential boxes in selected spaces and encouraging adolescent girls to write down and drop-off cases, complaints and issues into the boxes incognito, the **"Talking Boxes"** represent a revolutionary solution to breaking the silence on sexual harassment and abuse. Since then, we are convinced that if we indeed succeed in breaking the culture of silence around sexual harassment and abuse, then we will have safer homes, communities, and general spaces for our girls.

Polycom Development Project knows and acknowledges that if women and adolescent girls are not safe in respect for their rights, they cannot be full citizens

nor fully participate in the development of their own society. Adolescent Girls living in informal settlements, apart from the usual challenges of poverty, are faced with silent abuses, manipulation, and violence that they rarely speak about. These include sexual harassment and abuse by people who are supposed to protect them: parents, teachers, and the police. Through the sharing platform **"Talking**

Boxes", Polycom has been "listening" to these women and adolescent girls and clearly, **Girls are not safe. They are at risk at home, at school, by the roadside when they walk, in playgrounds... they are at risk everywhere!**

As women's and children's rights advocates, it is our confirmed finding that adolescent and teenage girls suffer the brunt of sexual harassment and abuse especially in the Kenya's informal settlements, - which is exacerbated by SILENCE. We have seen it; we have confirmed it and we continue to experience it on a daily basis. When children, women and

adolescent girls are at risk of sexual harassment and abuse, SILENCE becomes the most lethal deterrent to their safety, rights, and justice.

Polycom Development Project, through the "Talking Boxes" has been monitoring and documenting the voices of adolescent girls from schools in Kibera and acting upon incidences of violence to protect them.

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⁷ McLaughlin et al., 2017, The Economic and Career Effects of Sexual Harassment on Working Women. Gender and Society.

⁸ Darden et al., 2009, Social implications of the battle of the sexes: Sexual harassment disrupts female sociality and social recognition. Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.

The notes, and pieces of paper contain a myriad of issues: anxieties, pain, fears, and hopes of countless girls seeking to break the silence on threats to their well-being. This process is still on-going, and it will be sustained and expanded across more areas where adolescent girls are at risk.

Since 2011, Polycom, has strategically installed a total of **60** boxes across **60** schools with a total population of 6,292 aged 12 to 16 years in the sprawling Kibera Informal Settlements. Over the last 10 years, Polycom has received a total of **74,965** notes with a majority **74,942** (99.9%) notes from Adolescent girls (**12 to 16 years old**) and only 23 (0.03%) from boys. Currently, the talking boxes is being implemented across **48** schools among them are 20 schools with an estimated population of 3,300 adolescent girls which are supported by Womankind Worldwide

During the pandemic in 2020, we engaged Adolescent boys in a 3-day mentorship forum (targeting 100 Adolescent Boys per day) as a way of ensuring the safety of Adolescent girls, largely because they are viewed as the perpetrators by Adolescent girls and so that they become their sister's keeper and understand the impacts of all forms of violence against women and girl. Also, to learn some life skills. Issues raised by boys have been: seeking support by 18 (78%), complains about peer pressure by 4 (17%) and sodomy by 1 (4%) – reported in 2013. We journeyed with the boy and got him both Psychosocial and medical support at MSF Kibera.

Since January 2018 to December 2020, over **3,021** case notes by girls have been collected from **20 partner schools supported by Womankind** through the talking boxes proving that there is an urgent need to intervene and respond to the issues raised by the girls. The current project supported by **Womankind Worldwide** was designed to collect data that could provide evidence to influence stakeholders and formulate

better ways of tackling the issues of **sexual harassment and abuse of girls.**

Polycom development Project has been talking to adolescent girls, providing mentorship, equipping them to identify and report sexual violation cases within the community. We also created a simplified data information tool for sexual harassment, and information on safe spaces for engaging with and connecting with the adolescent girls. Polycom Development Project has been analyzing content data and mapping issues for action **to inform this Policy Evidence Paper.**

When adolescent girls grow up with a clear understanding of their value and become assertive in speaking out against violence and manipulation, we liberate our society in the fight to end all forms of violence. Polycom's work in Kibera has the potential to contribute to a reduction in cases of violence against adolescent girls, and spread awareness about the importance of a violence free society. With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the ensuing global pandemic this project and corresponding data collection have continued, and have become even

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more important as evidence of the abuses adolescent girls and girls face in the unprecedented scenario of school closures and strict lockdowns.

In 2016, The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill was proposed to tighten legislation and sentencing of sexual harassment offenders,

particularly related to crimes against minors. However, Kenyan lawmakers dismissed the bill partly due to a lack of sufficient and accurate data to demonstrate the magnitude of this problem. This project presents the missing **Policy Evidence** data.



Photo Courtesy Polycom Development project

*"When we initiated the **"Talking Boxes"** the girls found an outlet to vent out their pain, frustrations, suffering and confusion. We realized as the testimonies kept flowing in hundreds then in thousands that the girls had bottled in their problems for so long. They had cried for so long but no one was listening. They were desperately in need of someone to talk to, someone to listen to them. This is the escape the "Talking boxes has presented to them"*

Jane Anyango, Director – Polycom Development Project



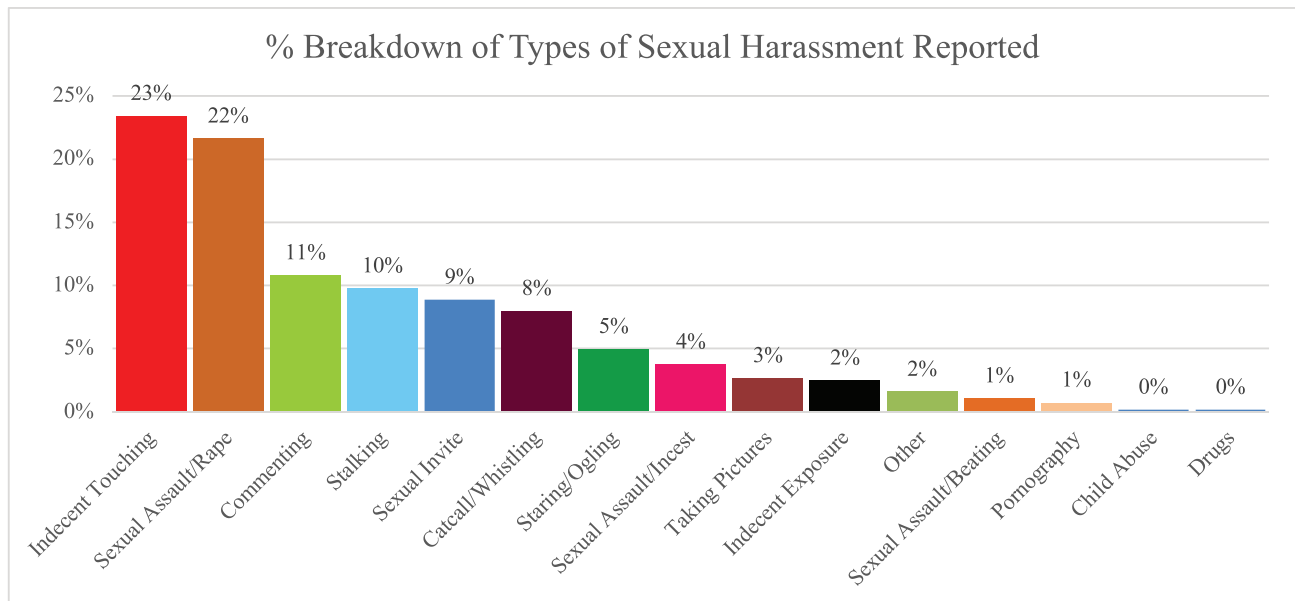
3. The “Talking Boxes” Testimonies

The talking boxes data demonstrates widespread harassment among adolescent girls in Kibera. Contents were categorized as ‘**generalized**’ or ‘**targeted**’ to better understand the nature and extent of sexual harassment. In addition, the classification based on common harassment types from initial data, as shown in the table below. These categorizations are not exhaustive; however it is up to Polycom to categorize the reports with a best fit for each individual note. Consequently, there are many experiences reported by the girls that cover multiple and intersecting categories, as you will see below. This further emphasizes the need for an intersectional response to the issues of harassment and abuse of adolescent girls, that demands attention from all levels; individuals, to communities, to law enforcement, to the government at large.

Generalized	
Common harassment description	Polycom Description
Displaying or distributing sexually explicit material	Showing Pornography
Using body language of sexual nature	Indecent exposure
Targeted	
Making Unwelcome comments	Commenting
Making Unwelcome attempts to touch someone	Indecent touching
Making unwelcome attempts to establish sexual relationship	Sexual invites
Unwelcome remarks to talk to someone about sexual matters	Comments
To glance with amorous invitation	Staring/Ogling
Taking pictures without consent	Taking Pictures
Sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without that person’s consent	Sexual Assault/Rape
To pursue or approach stealthily	Stalking
Shrill whistle or shout of disapproval	Catcalls/Whistling

Data from the Talking Boxes indicates that **comments** on sexual harassment were the third most reported by 564 (19%) of the 3,021 entries. Other comments shared by the adolescent girls include request for economic support by 742 (25%), enquiry about relationships and adolescent health by 637 (21%), and appreciation to the organization 466 (15%) among others.

The sexual harassment comments are as detailed in the chart below:



3.1 Indecent Touching (23%)



Indecent Touching

Among the girls who reported sexual harassment through the talking boxes, A majority 132 (23%) reported experiencing indecent touching. Touching private parts and buttocks was most common. Reported perpetrators for indecent touching include: father, uncles, teachers, touts (Matatu conductors), stepfathers and classmates. Some of the extracts are shown below:

"If a boy touches your private part by force, what should you do? If he forces you to take drugs?"

"One day my father came home and told me that he wants to touch my private parts. He told me that he is the only one who can touch it and it's his right"

"There is a boy that likes touching me. He even forced me to have sex with him. Please don't tell anyone, it's not the first time he has done it"

"There is a boy who likes catching girls breasts like your boyfriend"

"There is a teacher who loves touching girls in the buttocks"

"A tout touched my butt when I was getting into the matatu"

"A male teacher once touched my breast when I went to his office"

"My uncle comes to our house when my parents are gone and touches my private parts"

3.2 Sexual Assault/Rape (22%) & Incest (4%)



**Sexual Assault/
Rape**

Sexual Assault/Rape was the second most reported by 122 (22%) of girls through the talking boxes. Furthermore, the crime of being forced to have sexual intercourse between a parent and child, sibling, or grandparent (Incest) was reported by 21 (4%) of girls. Perpetrators reported by the girls include neighbors, boys, friends, fathers, stepfathers and grandfathers. Some of the notes shared are as below:

<i>"what if your mother is dead and your father is taking advantage of you by having sex with you"</i>
<i>"there is a man who came to our house when my parents were not there and he raped me"</i>
<i>"My mother used to bring for me men to have sex with me and then she is paid"</i>
<i>"I saw a girl in our class being raped and after that she was bleeding a lot"</i>
<i>"my neighbor called me to his house to wash his utensils then he raped me"</i>
<i>"when i have been raped and the man tells me that he will kill me. what will i do?"</i>

3.3 Commenting (11%) & Catcalling/Whistling (8%)



Commenting

Commenting, also popularly known as 'Catcalling', to express an opinion or reaction in speech. It was reported as the third most common form of harassment by 60 (11%) of the girls. While particularly sexually suggestive harassment (Catcalling) was reported by a further 45 (8%) of the girls. Perpetrators of commenting primarily include boys and teachers.

Some of the notes are shown below:

<i>"Telling you that you have a good voice, if you don't accept they start bullying you"</i>
<i>"A teacher from a certain school used to call students to his office and tell them dirty things"</i>
<i>"When someone tells you that you are thick"</i>
<i>"There is a day I was walking and a man called me and when I didn't go he started abusing me"</i>
<i>"A boy gave me money then he told me that i am beautiful and that he will rape me one day if i refuse to have sex with him"</i>
<i>"boys laugh at my boobs"</i>
<i>"When I walk I hear boys comment funny things and it makes me feel weird"</i>
<i>"There is a route around Darajani where boys sit and say unpleasant things when you pass. Like you are ugly when you fail to respond"</i>
<i>"One Saturday I was taking my friend to do chores then when we were on our way back a boy called her and when she refused he told her he had seen prettier girls and called her names"</i>
<i>"We were passing and some people started saying that we have big buttocks"</i>

3.4 Stalking (10%)



Stalking

Stalking, the willful and repeated following, watching, or harassing of another person over time, was reported as the 4th common form of harassment by 55 (10%) of the adolescent girls who reported sexual harassment. Boys and shop keepers were reported as the main perpetrators for stalking.

Select notes are as shared below:

<i>"What do you do if a person has been following you when I go back home from school"</i>
<i>"There is a boy who always follows me but I don't want him"</i>
<i>"I was being followed by a boy by the road, it was a bad situation"</i>
<i>"George harasses girls in school. She loves peeping at girls in the toilet"</i>
<i>"If there is a boy who is always following you no matter what you tell him, what should you do to make him stop?"</i>
<i>"Some male shopkeepers stalk girls"</i>
<i>"There is a man who has been following me when i go back home from school"</i>
<i>"There is a man who usually follows me from school"</i>
<i>"There are boys who are always following me when am from school"</i>
<i>"There is a man who keeps following me when am from school and he is very huge"</i>

3.5 Sexual Invites (9%)



Sexual Invites

Sexual invites or inviting a person towards sexual activity was reported by 50 (9%) of the girls. Common perpetrators were reported as men, shop keepers and boys. Select notes are as shared below:

<i>"When my mom sent me to the shop a man asked me if he could have sex with me, I refused because I am young"</i>
<i>"I went to the shop and the shopkeeper told me to get inside and have sex with him"</i>
<i>"If you are being forced by a boy to be his girlfriend and he tells you he will kill you if you don't, what should you do?"</i>
<i>"There is a boy who keeps asking to go to his house to dance for him and have sex"</i>
<i>"My neighbor likes inviting me to his house when my parents are not around"</i>
<i>"There is an old man who usually tells me that he wants me"</i>
<i>"A shopkeeper who gives me sweets for free and then he tells me that he wants to have sex with me"</i>
<i>"A teacher who calls girls to his house and gives them money and later tells them that he loves them"</i>
<i>"There is a boy who usually tells me that we meet in a corner at night, he tells me that am beautiful and that one day he will rape me"</i>

3.6 Staring/Ogling (5%)



Staring/Ogling

Looking with intention of making a sexual invitation as a form of harassment was reported by 28 (5%) of the girls with common perpetrators being boys.

3.7 Taking Pictures (4%)



Taking Picture

The crime of taking pictures without a person's permission, was reported by 17 (3%) of the girls, with common perpetrators being both boys and men.

3.8 Other Types

Harassment type	Number	%
Indecent Exposure	14	2%
Other (related to Adults)	9	2%
Sexual Assault/ Beating	6	1%
Pornography	4	1%
Child Abuse	1	0%
Drugs	1	0%
General Harassing	1	0%

Content from **The Talking Boxes** is devastatingly explicit at times in the revelation of sexual harassment and abuse. The girls' tiny handwritten notes, in shy scrawny handwriting tell obvious abuse, violation, harassment and trauma. Much of the content collected portrays the vulnerability of girls in the hands of adults, often those trusted with the responsibility of care and supervision. 14 note (2%) reported indecent exposure while 9 notes (2%) as shown in *graph 1* were reported to have occurred to Adults, that the girls witnessed but were not directly involved in: *"There is a woman in our plot who is always beaten by her husband"*.



4. Interventions

The success of the Talking Boxes is as much to do with how information from these notes is fed back to adolescent girls in a way that is anonymous, inclusive and rights focused. Polycom Development Project has been talking to adolescent girls by providing mentorship, equipping girls to identify and report sexual violation cases within the community. The project designed and branded 20 boxes which were mounted at strategic spaces easily accessible by girls within the schools for data collection. Data from the boxes was collected on a weekly basis and entered to a database for review and analysis.

The project identified gatekeepers: 20 teachers, 20 administrators and 10 stakeholder representatives who were trained on the use of the Talking Box methodology, and were also encouraged to empower the adolescent girls on its use. The gatekeepers were also linked to the police, religious leaders and administration for case-by-case management.

A total of 10 mentors were trained on the different forms of sexual harassment and data collection to speak to the community, and instruct the adolescent girls on the different forms of sexual harassment and their rights. Through regular GPende assemblies, girls are reminded that they don't have to keep their problems to themselves, but have an outlet share them anonymously on paper.

The project provided a simplified information-sharing tool for sexual harassment. Further, the foundation of regular safe space forums for adolescent girls, enabled them to engage with and make connections to the data that is being shared, and what pathways are available to them to make them feel safer.

In this way, data from talking boxes has been analyzed and the emerging issues mapped for action and is the basis for the recommendations of this influencing paper.

The project identified gatekeepers: 20 teachers, 20 administrators and 10 stakeholder representatives who were trained on the use of the Talking Box methodology, and were also encouraged to empower the adolescent girls on its use.

The traditional Talking Boxes format was extremely hindered by the onset of COVID-19. Polycom worked rapidly to enable adaptations to the traditional school-focused Talking Boxes when schools closed in March 2020. The consequent lockdown led to an upsurge in experiences of domestic violence and abuse for many adolescent girls, with upwards of 500 people coming direct to Polycom's compound in Kibera, seeking safety from unstable home situations.

To continue progress during the national lockdown a further four Talking Boxes

were branded with stickers on COVID-19 and sexual harassment, and were placed strategically in the main markets and local information points within Kibera. On occasion mentors would stand with boxes, giving the opportunity to share information with both adolescent girls and the wider community. In this way, the project was able to continue working with the many adolescent girls they had already been supporting as well as opening to new participants. As lockdown restrictions eased in Kenya, further Safe Space sessions were hosted by mentors.



5. Stakeholder Analysis

Based on the findings that continue to flow through the “Talking Boxes” project, Polycom engaged a number of diverse stakeholders on ending sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent girls in Kibera. Their engagement in preparation for this Evidence paper focused largely on unpacking and seeking strategies on ending threats to adolescent girls and women. Most of the stakeholders engaged over this period worked as community-based rights workers, children rights advocates, women and girls rights champions, community health workers and trainers, teachers and caregivers.

Below we present a set of challenges and opportunities that came out of discussions with stakeholders based on the findings of the Talking Boxes and solutions.

5.1 Challenges to ending sexual harassment of Adolescent girls in Kibera;

- ▶ **Poor and inadequate evidence gathering and communication mechanisms** for the reporting of cases:

This includes lack of appropriate forensic evidence collection, as well as a fear of the police and the potential further actions

of their perpetrators, by the adolescent girls. It is also very poor documentation of cases in both formal and informal reporting mechanisms, leading to cases being dismissed for lack of tangible evidence.

- ▶ **Poverty exacerbates vulnerability** of adolescent girls in Kibera:

Statistics show that poverty increases people’s vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation in the workplace, schools, and that people with the lowest socioeconomic status are at greater risk of violence.⁹ Poverty leads to both drugs and alcohol abuse, lack of food and safe accommodation, neglect from parents and caregivers while the geography of informal settlements compromises safety for girls at risk.

- ▶ **Harmful traditions and cultural practices:**

As stakeholders have reported, adolescent girls who survive sexual violence can be sent outside of Kibera and Nairobi, to rural villages to silence cases. There is also a stigma attached to such experiences that leads to survivors keeping them secret and waiting a long time after the incidents to seek

⁹ Jewkes, Sen, Garcia-Moreno, 2007, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. [Poverty & Sexual Violence](#).

help and report officially, causing evidence and perpetrators to disappear. The ability of adolescent girls to report can be further impeded when the perpetrators are close family members.

► **Impunity from the authorities** regarding sexual harassment:

Official authorities are prone to widespread tolerance of sexual violence, with investigations being hampered by expectations of bribes, a lack of basic equipment and generally poor standards of professionalism.¹⁰ It is also common for survivors' families to accept compensation from perpetrators, in out of court settlements.

► **Fear**

This is a great impeding factor. Most victims are often threatened by perpetrators. This greatly affects the quality of data given at police stations further contributing to cases dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence.

► **Inactive Gender Desks**

The Government had initially established gender desks within Police Stations to address issues of Gender Based Violence. However, most of these desks are not active and most often the officer manning them is not trained on handling violence issues.

5.2 Opportunities for ending sexual harassment of girls in Kibera;

► **Creating awareness** in the informal settlements

The aim of creating awareness is to reach out to adolescent girls and stakeholders in the community, to be able to share information on sexual abuse and for stakeholders to take appropriate action against perpetrators of sexual harassment. Awareness will also inform the community about the illegal nature of sexual harassment with the intention of influencing their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs.

► **Enhancing adolescent girls' mentorship and empowerment** on how to protect themselves

An empowerment session with the adolescent girls enhances their knowledge, skills, influences their mindsets and fights their internal fear. These sessions are very informative and engaging. An adolescent girl who is informed is more empowered than the one without information at all. It gives them power to say no to any form of sexual harassment and to identify trusted friends and adults to report such experiences to.

¹⁰ Peace Direct, 2014, [Challenging impunity: the struggle to end gender-based violence in Kenya](#).

► **Increasing adolescent girls' awareness on issues and best practice**

For a crime of this nature to truly end, knowledge and best practices need to be discussed with the participants and in this case survivors of sexual harassment/violence. The platforms for creating awareness among adolescent girls need to be diverse as this allows for a wider reach. Once the platforms are increased, awareness will increase and eventually the crime will be stopped.

► **Engaging boys on how to support adolescent girls** in the community and avoidance measures

Adolescent boys are most often identified as perpetrators, as they often see their actions as a form of courtship. Enlightening boys and men in the community on the difference between consensual and non-consensual encounters, and the consequences of sexual harassment are a key strategy. They need to be

aware that when a woman or girl has not given consent, what they are doing violates the rights of that person. As we speak, more adolescent boys use various forms of sexual harassment to socially pressure adolescent girls, and this is compounded by a societal belief that their actions are normal.

► **Engaging parents and other key players** on the protection of girls

Once parents and key stakeholders, such as the Department for Children's Services, in the Ministry for Gender, are engaged, a whole community-mobilisation will be key to creating awareness and bringing an end to sexual harassment. This will ensure that our adolescent girls are protected by all key stakeholders. Parents also often protect perpetrators, especially in cases of incest. Once they are more aware of the extent of such crimes and know where they can report cases securely, they too can play a key role specifically in ending the impunity of perpetrators.



6. Recommendations and Conclusion

This report set out to shine a spotlight on the reality of cases of sexual harassment and abuse, as authentically reported by the affected adolescent girls themselves. It is a journey through the unscripted testimonies of adolescent girls, who have found an outlet to many “unspoken” incidences of abuse, harassment, and violations through writing it out to the “Talking Boxes”.

It is the conclusion of this paper that law enforcement agencies like the police, judiciary officers and paralegals, community mobilisers and watchdogs, the media, civil society organizations, teachers, parents, and guardians all have an important role to play to ensure adolescent girls are safe and protected.

In a substantive process seeking solutions to ending sexual harassment, abuse, and violence against adolescent girls in schools, homes and in the community, the Polycom Development Project has simultaneously analyzed the content collected from the “Talking Boxes” and mobilized community stakeholders to unpack recommendations for diverse official actors.

These recommendations are tailored to fellow community members, the police and law enforcement officials, policy makers, the media, and the Kenyan

government. In so doing Polycom moves one step closer to fulfilling its stakeholders’ ambition to make the lives of adolescent girls in Kibera safer.

One notable gap is data from the special populations, for instance a girl who is raped and is deaf and dumb – how can she report the incident? She wants to speak out, but she cannot express herself. Polycom recommends that focused sensitization to this specific group be undertaken and training conducted to officers at the Police Gender Desk who can handle such delicate issues.

This section outlines the critical recommendations for diverse stakeholders and duty bearers to tighten the focus on ending sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent girls, and aspires towards totally eradicating these practices. The following recommendations to different stakeholders are key to largely reducing and/or ending sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent girls in Kibera.

As espoused from the findings of the “Talking Boxes” it is imperative that the various stakeholders mentioned below take these specific recommendations seriously if we are to end the harmful sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent girls.

6.1 To the community

- ◆ Heighten the reporting of all cases of child abuse and sexual harassment
- ◆ Create and strengthen continuous engagement, Community dialogues, sensitization and awareness on issues affecting children; sexual harassment & abuse.
- ◆ SPEAK OUT – break the silence on sexual harassment and abuse
- ◆ Communities to be trained on what to do when an issue on sexual harassment has occurred e.g. rape case
- ◆ Educate the community of evidence and presentation & preservation in case of sexual abuse.
- ◆ Avoid “criminalizing the victims” by exonerating perpetrators, e.g. warning survivors not to walk at night or to “dress decently”. This trivializes the blame on the perpetrator and shifts it to the victim. In addition, extra caution by parents and guardians on their children is key.

6.2 To the civil society organizations

- ◆ Pro-actively report and monitor the sexual harassment
- ◆ Continuously lobby the government on the safety of adolescent girls and prevention of abuse and harassment while working closely with law enforcers to ensure justice
- ◆ Sustain the education and training of the community on adolescent girls’ rights and sensitize and empower the community on gender-based violence
- ◆ CSOs & NGOs and government

stakeholders to partner towards sexual harassment

- ◆ Provide Advocacy expertise on ending sexual harassment & abuse
- ◆ Support communities and victims to access police service and protection, health and legal services.

6.3 To the police, the community administration leaders and the judiciary

- ◆ Operationalize the enacted Sexual Offences Act
- ◆ Enforce existing laws arrest and reprimand perpetrators & offenders of sexual harassment & abuse
- ◆ Operate active & efficient response desks to cases of sexual harassment & abuse of girls & children
- ◆ Ensure proper training of health care workers, police, legal officers and the community in handling sexual offences and abuse of adolescent girls and children
- ◆ Actively ensure the provision of resources that are critical in ending sexual abuse and harassment of minors

6.4 To the Policy Makers. (Politicians, Parliamentarians, Law makers and Regulators)

- ◆ Ensure the review and subsequent operationalization of the Sexual Offences Act 2016
- ◆ LISTEN to the plight of those affected and/or targeted by abuse and harassment

- ◆ Strengthen the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act

6.5 To the media

- ◆ Partner with CSOs and NGOs on efforts to end sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent girls.
- ◆ Sustain the sensitization of the public about sexual harassment and abuses through your media platforms and regulate and provide age-appropriate media content
- ◆ Support and provide visibility on the issues of sexual harassment and abuse of minors
- ◆ Sustain factual and timely information to the community on sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent girls
- ◆ Provide campaign and advocacy platforms on ending sexual harassment and abuse of girls and women.

Postface

The audacity of the Polycom Development Project to institute and implement the process of the **“Talking Boxes”** in Kibera speaks of a solution-based approach in the desperate agitation to ending sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent girls in Kibera.

The findings from the **“Talking Boxes”** that form the thrust of this Evidence Paper are a clear indication and confirmation that breaking the silence of sexual harassment and abuse is a first and critical step to ending this threat to adolescent girls in Kibera.

The testimonies from the **“Talking Boxes”** often offered from the pain and suffering of bewildered adolescent girls of Kibera, is a desperate cry for help, and a plea to stakeholders and duty-bearers to rise to the demands of protection for children and girls.

It is the hope with this Evidence Report that stakeholder recommendations, as stipulated within, will be seriously considered and action taken against perpetrators. It is lastly the underlying focus and hope that the rights of girls in Kibera and across Kenya as a whole, will be prioritized and upheld.



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*Wherever they go, whatever they do,
whomever they meet, Adolescent
girls are at risk simply by being girls..
which should not be the case at all!
#ProtectGirls Everywhere!*

- Polycom Development Project

