



CASE STUDY

Deevabits Green Energy



RENEWABLE ENERGY



SME



KENYA

STRENGTHENING THE SAFETY NET:

Anti-sexual harassment procedures removing barriers to women's workforce participation

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Introduction

1.1 Is this case study for you?

This case study describes Deevabits' successful journey in improving employee safety through anti-sexual harassment policies and practices. This work included the development and implementation of a robust anti-sexual harassment policy and a tailored training program for the anti-sexual harassment committee and all employees.

This case study is relevant for:



HR professionals and corporate leaders at medium to large-sized companies looking for actionable insights and strategies to improve workplace safety and address sexual harassment.



NGOs, government bodies, international development agencies, and funders who wish to support initiatives aimed at enhancing workplace safety and combating sexual harassment.

While the case study includes examples specific to field staff, **its lessons are broadly applicable to various environments working to enhance workplace safety and employee well-being.**

We trust this case study will effectively demonstrate that a commitment to employee safety and dignity is not just a legal obligation but a key component of organizational success and sustainability.



1.2 Hampering potential: How women's role in important growth sectors may be limited by sexual harassment risks

With its localized and field-based nature, distributed renewable energy (DRE) provides unique opportunities for women in remote areas to participate in energy access initiatives as entrepreneurs, technicians, and field staff. Moreover, the DRE sector plays a vital role in job creation, especially in emerging and developing economies, with global employment in renewable energy reaching approximately 13.7 million jobs in 2022.^{1,2} It is seen as a major employment engine, offering both productive and decent employment.

However, due to isolated working conditions and extensive travel, such roles also expose women to heightened safety risks, including sexual harassment. This is in contrast to their counterparts in the broader renewable energy (RE) sector, who typically work in more centralized and regulated (office-based) environments.



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BOX 1

About this project

Value for Women supported Deevabits from July 2022 through July 2024 to increase its gender-inclusive business practices, with a specific goal to strengthen its anti-sexual harassment policy and foster an organizational culture that values and protects all its employees, including field staff.

This was part of a joint initiative by [Shortlist](#) and [Value for Women](#) under the Women for Green Jobs (W4GJ) program, funded by the [Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet](#) (GEAPP). The goal of W4GJ is to ensure that more women are accessing and succeeding in clean energy careers in Africa, specifically targeting job placements, career support, and employer-level interventions across sub-Saharan Africa.



Shortlist is a talent and impact advisory firm that provides recruitment services and technology for both leadership hiring and large-scale workforce innovation programs across African startups, social ventures, and mission-driven organizations. Shortlist Futures team designs and implements youth employment and workforce programs across Africa in partnership with donors, governments, enterprises, and educators. These programs span several sectors including off-grid energy, climate technology, and global digital economy.



Founded by the Rockefeller and Ikea foundations and the Bezos Earth Fund, GEAPP is an alliance of philanthropy, governments, technology, policy, and financing partners working together to support developing countries shift to a clean energy model that ensures universal energy access while enabling the global community to meet critical climate goals during the next decade.



Value for Women is a global pioneer with a mission to promote women's participation and leadership in business, finance, and investment in emerging markets. It does this through building individual leadership, equipping businesses, and driving innovation through data & research. Value for Women is a woman-led company, and its diverse team is spread across 5 continents with expertise in countless sectors.

BOX 2:

Distributed renewable energy (DRE) explained

Distributed renewable energy (DRE) systems are localized systems that generate renewable energy close to where it is used, such as solar home systems and mini-grids. Unlike large-scale solar or wind plants that supply large-scale energy to major cities, DRE systems typically serve remote or rural areas with limited or no access to traditional power grids, providing energy directly to households or small communities.

BOX 3:

The toxic impacts of sexual harassment in the workplace

Sexual harassment in the workplace leads to a toxic organizational culture and significantly impacts performance, through reduced employee productivity, increased absenteeism, and neglect of responsibilities. The financial toll is considerable, with physical and sexual abuse costing Kenya approximately 1.1% of its GDP annually.³ Furthermore, unchecked harassment results in high employee turnover.⁴

The detrimental impact on women is especially pronounced. According to a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), 90% of women in Kenya's cut-flower sector cite sexual violence and harassment as major workplace challenges.⁵ Additionally, a survey by Women in News across eight African countries reveals that 50% of women have experienced sexual harassment at work.⁶ Despite these high incident rates, organizational responses are often lacking, with only 42% of reported cases leading to any action, usually just warnings to the offenders.⁷ This significantly impacts women's physical and mental health,⁸ restricts their career options, and contributes to wage disparities,⁹ underscoring the need for organizations to develop more gender-inclusive policies and effective mechanisms to address and prevent sexual harassment.

Women's representation in the DRE sector remains low, at only 32% of the global renewable energy workforce and even fewer in technical roles.¹⁰ In Kenya, for example, women constitute just 5% of licensed solar technicians and 10-15% in technical roles.¹¹ Gender-specific barriers, such as cultural norms, safety concerns, lack of access to finance, and limited skills, heavily impact women's participation.¹²

This case study describes the journey of one employer in the renewable energy sector - Deevabits - that effectively enhanced workplace safety for its field staff. In so doing, it overcame a key obstacle to women field staff entering and remaining in field roles.

THE STORY OF DEEVABITS: Overcoming safety concerns for women field staff

2.1 Meet Deevabits: A social enterprise driving rural energy access

Deevabits is a for-profit social enterprise headquartered in Kenya that distributes and finances energy products and services to rural customers through a team of commission-based field staff,¹³ primarily women and youth.

Deevabits aimed to scale its operations from 12 to 32 counties in Kenya, **necessitating a significant expansion of its field staff.** Yet, it was experiencing **challenges attracting and retaining women field staff, primarily due to women's safety and security concerns,** associated with extensive travel in remote areas.

2.2 Diagnosing the problem: How Deevabits uncovered priority areas for action

To better understand these safety and security concerns and how to address them, Deevabits, with the support of Value for Women, conducted a holistic gender diagnostic.

The diagnostic revealed gaps in Deevabits' existing safety and grievance policies and the culture around them.

From a policy perspective, the company's anti-sexual harassment (ASH) policy and harassment redressal system showed critical gaps. First, the policy was unclear on the complaint redressal procedure, leaving staff uncertain how to proceed in the case of sexual harassment incidents. Second, **both the policy and the system were only applicable to full-time employees. This excluded most of the (part-time) field staff, who make up the majority of the organization's employees.** It also meant that Deevabits did not have data or incidence reports to validate leadership's general notion of the risks faced by their field staff.

In addition to reviewing applicable policies, we conducted a dedicated survey among field staff, which revealed the presence of specific risks in customer engagements. The majority of field staff (97%) indicated they felt safe overall at the places their work takes them. However, a significant 12% of the field staff overall (16% of women and 8% of men) indicated that, overall, they do not feel safe or free from harassment *when engaging customers*. Moreover, 10% of women (and 7% of men) were unaware of who to contact if they weren't safe.

With this information, Deevabits recognized that strengthening feelings of safety, particularly from harassment, would be key for increasing their recruitment and retention of women field staff.

BOX 4: What is a gender diagnostic

At Value for Women, a **gender diagnostic** is an assessment to identify:

- The presence of any gender gaps in the organization (in representation, satisfaction, growth, pay, or challenges experienced);
- The presence and strength of key policies to promote and safeguard gender inclusion (among others, anti-sexual harassment policies); and
- The opportunities for organizations to improve in these areas.

It consists of interviews and a review of organizational data, policies, and processes.

Value for Women uses the insights from the diagnostic to design high-impact actions that will advance corporate gender and business outcomes. These are then prioritized by the company's leadership and translated into a **Gender Action Plan**, which serves as a work plan for implementing those actions.



TAKING ACTION:

A three-pronged approach to strengthening anti-sexual harassment mechanisms

Based on the diagnostic results and identified best practices, Deevabits developed a **Gender Action Plan (GAP) to strengthen its anti-sexual harassment policy and protect all its employees, including field staff**. This included updating the company's existing anti-sexual harassment policy in line with international best practices and legal requirements and covering field-level risk; establishing the company's first anti-sexual harassment committee; and, raising awareness among staff on workplace safety and prevention of harassment. All eyes were on establishing a foundation for a more inclusive, respectful, and equitable work environment.



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ACTION 1

Strengthened anti-sexual harassment policy and instated inaugural anti-sexual harassment committee

Value for Women conducted a detailed review of the existing Deevabits anti-sexual harassment policy to check for alignment with legal requirements and international best practices.

Value for Women then **developed recommendations for strengthening the policy, ensuring it covers field staff and their particular risks.**

See page 10 for tips on developing a strong anti-sexual harassment policy



Following international best practices, Value for Women supported **Deevabits in instating their first anti-sexual harassment committee (5 women, 3 men)**. The committee was tasked with developing and implementing the company's anti-sexual harassment policies and reporting mechanisms, taking the lead when incidents are reported, and educating employees.

See page 10 for tips on constituting a strong anti-sexual harassment committee



RESULTS

These measures created a framework for Deevabits employees to report and prevent harassment. As a result of the expanded policies, and the first anti-sexual harassment committee, **field staff now report incidents with customers, whereas previously only office-based workers made any reports.**

ACTION 2

Trained the anti-sexual harassment committee on preventing and redressing sexual harassment cases

Value for Women trained the **Deevabits anti-sexual harassment committee, equipping its members with essential technical knowledge and skills to prevent incidents and manage complaints effectively.** This training was the first of its kind for Deevabits staff and covered the following topics:

- Understanding the need for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace
- Identifying different forms of sexual harassment
- Implementing comprehensive and effective grievance procedures
- Improving soft skills for sensitive investigations through scenario-based discussions
- Maintaining detailed and confidential documentation

RESULTS

Today, **100% of the anti-sexual harassment committee have received the training and built the capacity to fulfill their roles and responsibilities** as committee members, whereas previously, no Deevabits employees had received such training.

The training expanded committee members' understanding of sexual harassment, uncovering many previously overlooked behaviors as harassment, such as calling women "honey", rewards/incentives being offered post-working hours, and hugging colleagues without consent.

"The training was eye-opening as it made us aware that anything that makes someone uncomfortable is harassment, even the often well-intended compliments like telling someone they are beautiful."

- Area Sales Manager, Deevabits

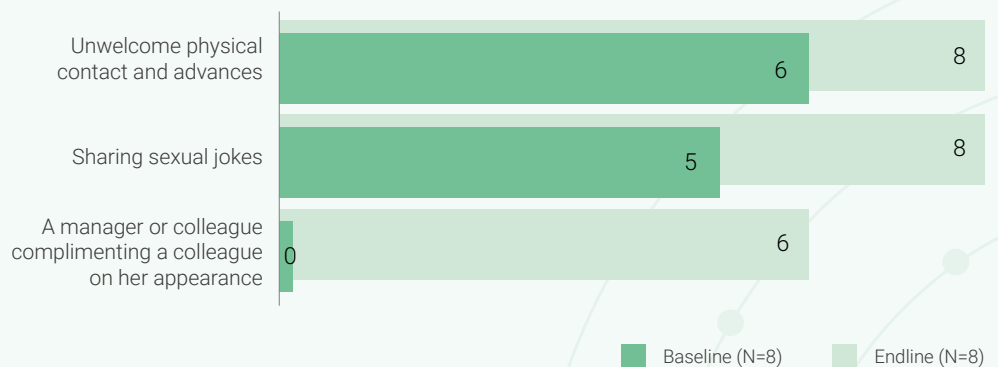
"The training has given me proper guidelines on how to deal with such situations and ensure that in an event such a situation occurs, how to prevent it from reoccurring or how to follow up once the situation has been dealt with."

- Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee member, Deevabits

"I am now aware that some small acts can affect my colleagues at work. So there is that awareness because you find that many employees are not aware of small things that could affect their colleagues and end up resulting in low productivity or job loss."

- Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee member, Deevabits

Figure 1. Anti-sexual harassment committee members who correctly identified as sexual harassment...



An unexpected result of this training was that upon becoming aware of the practical risks facing their field staff, the committee took it upon themselves to suggest practical changes to company-wide safety measures— such as paired travel and restricting visits to customer homes after 6:00 p.m.

ACTION 3

Raised awareness among staff on workplace safety and prevention of harassment.

The anti-sexual harassment committee **adapted and translated the training modules and templates provided by Value for Women to effectively train the broader team and raise their awareness** about the prevention and redressal of sexual harassment at Deevabits. Individual committee members are in the process of **rolling out these training modules across all organizational levels**, which is further enabled by the broad representation of the committee across the organization. For example: Individual Area Sales Managers on the committee are rolling out the training among their specific team and region.

RESULTS

The initial staff trainings have led to increased feelings of safety, more professional conduct, and improved productivity.

- For example, **customer service officers now use specific language and protocols to address inappropriate comments from customers**, resulting in less tolerance for harassment and better job performance.
- **Employee interactions have also become more attentive and respectful**, fostering a more inclusive workplace culture.
- **Committee members are now better equipped to handle harassment reports effectively.** For example, an anti-sexual harassment committee member proactively addressed a customer's inappropriate behavior, reinforcing the company's commitment to a respectful, harassment-free environment.

“All the team's communication with the customers is different since the training. It is different because before, you would find that customers may be talking [about] some things to customer care which are not required [in the working relationship], like “you have a nice voice, can I meet you, can I have your number”...and now the customer care [team member] tells the customer “we are doing work and I am helping you as my customer, nothing else. You cannot talk about something different apart from the work we are doing.”

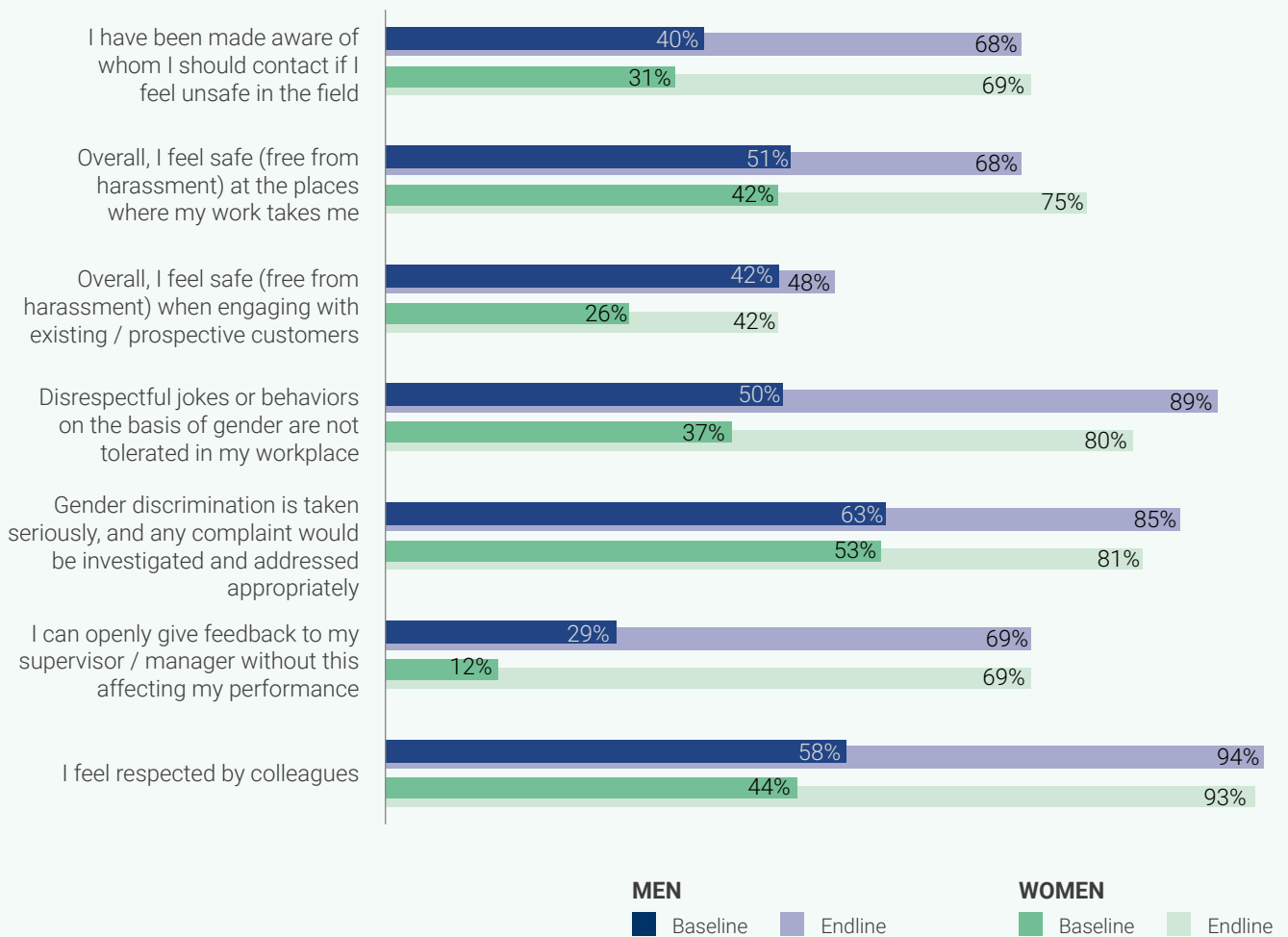
- Area Sales Manager, Deevabits

Deevabits staff, both office- and field-based, reported an increased awareness of whom to contact in case of unsafety, a greater overall sense of safety, and a stronger agreement that gender discrimination and disrespectful jokes would not be tolerated within the organization. **Additionally, there was a notable increase in feelings of support and respect among colleagues, as well as between colleagues and managers**— which was an unintended additional positive consequence of this work.

Highlights include:

- **A 122% increase in women field staff being aware of whom to contact** in case of unsafety - effectively closing the gender gap observed upon baseline
- **More than double the proportion of women field staff strongly agree that disrespectful jokes would not be tolerated**
- **More than 4x the proportion of women field staff strongly agree that they can openly give feedback to their managers** without reprisals - effectively closing the gender gap observed upon baseline
- **More than double the proportion of women field staff strongly agree that they feel respected by their colleagues** - again, closing the gender gap observed upon baseline

Figure 2. Increase in respondents that strongly agree with the following statements, between baseline and endline¹⁴



“As a woman, it makes me feel safer knowing there is a team (anti-sexual harassment committee) I can talk to about my safety and security concerns at the workplace.”

– **Head of Operations, Deevabits**

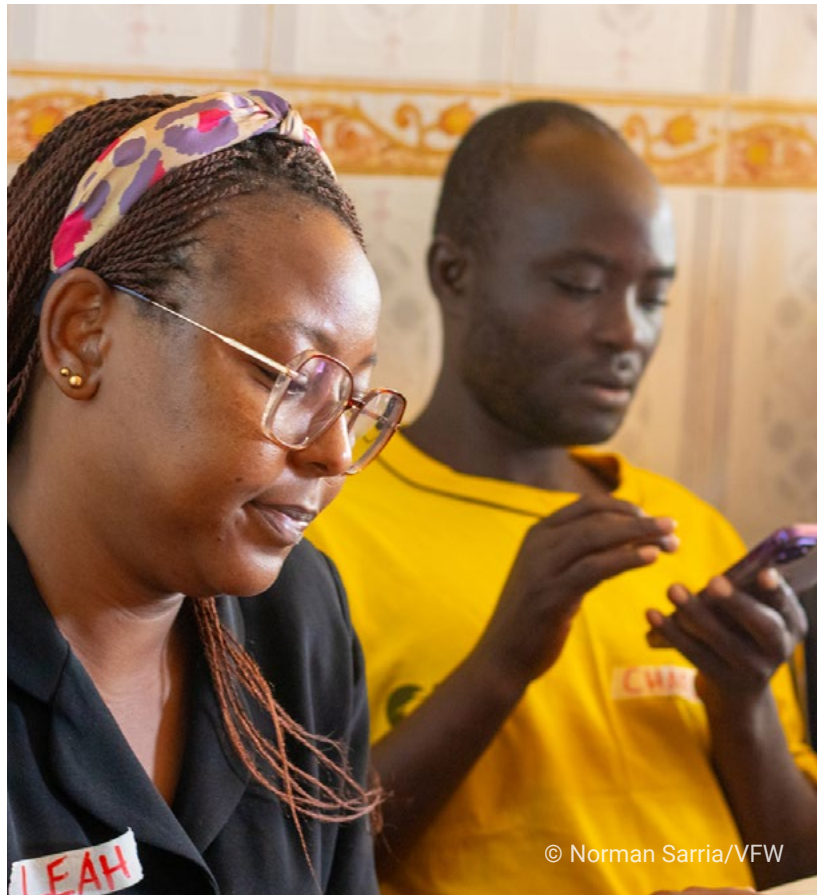
“As one of the committee members, I’ll ensure we come up with policies that every employee will go through, and in case there are challenges in interpreting the policies, have someone who will interpret.”

– **Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee member, Deevabits**

3.2 The road ahead: Sustaining momentum in safety and inclusivity

With the foundational anti-sexual harassment training successfully completed, Deevabits plans to build on this momentum by **expanding training programs** with regular refresher courses and a train-the-trainer program **to ensure continuous awareness among all employees.**

Deevabits also plans to strengthen communication for easy and confidential incident reporting and will continue to enforce strict working hours and paired travel for field staff. By fostering continuous employee engagement, **Deevabits aims to increase retention by leveraging feedback loops to create a culture of respect, safety, and mutual support for all employees.**



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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Anti-sexual harassment mechanisms to protect every employee

Deevabits's experience highlights the importance of having robust anti-sexual harassment mechanisms. It underscores the need for broad policy coverage and awareness-raising across the organization to ensure that all staff, regardless of their role and its particular risk exposure, feel protected and supported.

This work should serve as a starting point for any organization aiming to safeguard their employees effectively. We encourage all readers to review the recommendations in the following box, evaluate their current policies against these standards, and take steps to address any gaps.

TIPS FOR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:

How to implement strategies to reduce sexual harassment risks in the workplace and field

We recommend that all organizations, regardless of size or sector, take deliberate steps to reduce the risks of sexual harassment in the workplace. These steps are fundamental for establishing a secure and respectful work environment. **Ensuring your workforce's safety from sexual harassment is not just a legal obligation but a moral imperative— and a prerequisite for productive and engaged staff.**

For organizations interested in replicating this work, we recommend the following steps:

1. Collect and analyze sex-disaggregated data to understand employee perceptions and awareness of sexual harassment across all levels, particularly looking out for any differences between office-based and field-based staff.

The analysis should identify challenges specific to certain roles or staff members (such as women), including the particular locations, times, and forms of harassment they might frequently experience. Ensure the confidentiality of all information shared by your staff.

2. Develop an anti-sexual harassment policy, or strengthen your existing one, in alignment with local legal requirements.

A strong anti-sexual harassment policy should include at least:

- **Definitions of what constitutes harassment**, including clear examples and scenarios to further illustrate these;
- **An explicit mention of all workplace stakeholders and engagements that are covered by the policy**, to ensure the policy covers the entire world of work (ensure you protect contractors, interns, job applicants, customers, suppliers, etc. and ensure you cover engagements that take place in the office, at social outings, during work-related travel, conferences, etc.);
- **Measures taken by the company to prevent incidences of sexual harassment**;
- **Incident reporting procedures**, including clear step-by-step instructions for staff to take in different scenarios;
- **Measures taken by the company to safeguard confidentiality and privacy**, including in instances where reports are made by or against senior management and/or members of the anti-sexual harassment committee;
- **Grievance redressal mechanisms**; and
- **Possible consequences** for perpetrators.

3. Instate an anti-sexual harassment committee, ensuring it is equipped with a clear mandate and resources.

The primary purpose of an anti-sexual harassment committee is to ensure the well-being and protection of all employees from sexual harassment. The structure of an anti-sexual harassment committee can vary based on the organization's unique needs and circumstances, such as internal, industry, and legal obligations.

Typically, an anti-sexual harassment committee should **be constituted as follows**:

- **Be gender-balanced**;
- **Have representation from across the organizations**, ensuring employees at all levels, in all departments, and across all geographies have easy access to a committee member they might feel comfortable engaging;

- **Have at least three types of members:**
 - Presiding officer or chairperson
 - Internal members
 - An external member;
- And, if the organization has multiple administrative divisions in different locations, it is best practice to **constitute an ASH committee in each administrative division.**

To ensure the effectiveness of an anti-sexual harassment committee, **its mandate should include at least the following:**

- **Development and implementation of policies** that define sexual harassment;
- Establishment of **reporting mechanisms;**
- **Conducting investigations;**
- **Taking appropriate actions** to address reported incidents; and
- **Educating employees about their rights,** prevention strategies, and available resources for support and redressal.
- Be sure to **specify in your policy and the committee charter what the relationship is between the committee and senior management;** the role of the committee in handling complaints by/against members of senior management; and the extent to which the committee's recommendations (on redressal, for example) are binding.

4. Set up a grievance receipt and redressal mechanism that:

- **Creates a safe, confidential, and accessible environment for victims and witnesses to report incidents.** This could include multiple reporting channels such as direct lines to anti-sexual harassment committees, anonymous hotlines, and online reporting tools to cater to diverse needs and preferences.
- **Ensures that the redressal procedures are survivor-centric.** This means that the complainant's comfort and preferences must, at all times, be prioritized throughout the process. This can be achieved by providing multiple channels that meet complainants where they are, and providing complainants with various redressal options from which to choose. For example, having representatives in various departments and counties can make it easier for individuals to report incidents without having to reach out to the head office.
- **Offers transparency in the reporting process.** Employees should be well-informed about how their reports will be handled and investigated, fostering a sense of trust and reliability in the system. Disclose, for example, any reporting agreements you have with investors or other stakeholders.
- **Establishes appropriate timing for the reporting process.** While it is essential to encourage and facilitate speedy reporting to enhance the accuracy of the reports and offer immediate support to the affected staff, it is equally important not to impose too many restrictions that might hinder the process. Avoid a scenario in which complainants feel pressured to report immediately, and allow them time to come to terms with the incident in their own time.

5. Ensure practical communication of the anti-sexual harassment policy to all employees, contractors, field staff, and stakeholders through comprehensive training sessions, inclusion in employee handbooks, and detailed onboarding materials.

The communication should include scenarios/incidences that staff might encounter in the field to facilitate understanding. It is good practice to assess the effectiveness of the channels and language used for this communication, and comprehension.

Endnotes

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- 13 Please note that Deevabits refers to its field-based sales agents as village social entrepreneurs (VSEs). In this case study, for clarity we refer to them as "field staff".
- 14 The baseline assessment (August 2023) was completed by 210 field staff (92 men and 118 women), and the endline assessment (June 2024) was completed by 153 field staff (62 men and 91 women).