#METOO

HEADLINES FROM A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

UN WOMEN

In 2019 UN Women[1] reviewed the #MeToo presence on Twitter between 2017 and 2019 in order to understand its reach, the nature of its content.

#MeToo as a movement began in 2006 under the leadership of Tarana Burke; it exploded worldwide (figure 1) when Alyssa Milano used the same term, hashtagged, on social media in October 2017. The combined power of Hollywood celebrity and social media provided a new forum with a global reach for connections and advocacy on a subject that had long been known but had not been at the top of public policy agendas. That quickly changed.

Extending beyond Hollywood and the USA, the urge and urgency to name, decry and denounce sexual harassment emerged powerfully through #MeToo. #MeToo became virtual support channels for those who spoke, who shared their experiences – the best of social media's possibilities. Social media connections are not in line with established understandings of how social movements happen but the global mobilisation, solidarity and impact of #MeToo require re-consideration of previous approaches to how change happens. This is timely, as Generation Equality Fora and Agenda 2030 work progress.

The #MeToo movement created a moment – where legislators, policy makers, companies, universities, the United Nations, NGOs, scientists, athletes, entertainment industries, legal professionals and many others had no option but to address sexual harassment and many did so with renewed vigour. Expectations also moved – the acquiescence that had widely and historically been known morphed into an expectation that sexual harassment would no longer be normal, expected, inevitable or unavoidable.

FIGURE 1
Initial explosion and peaks #MeToo (Twitter) – 2016-2019

Jul 2017   Jan 2018   Jul 2018

MeToo — Volume from 1/1/16 to 2/19/19
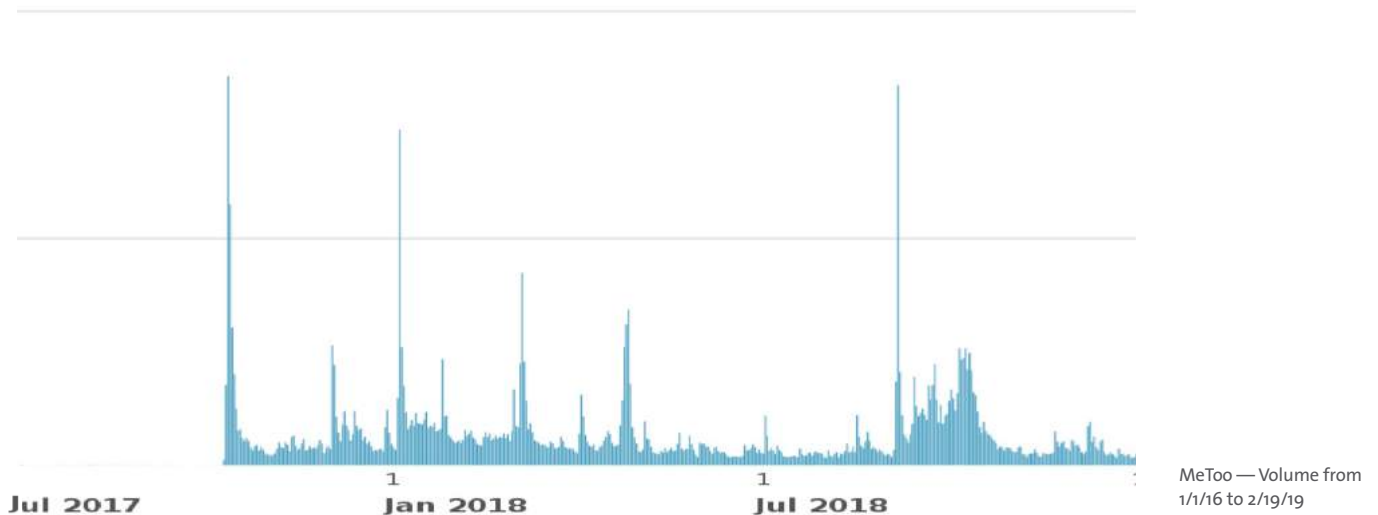
UN Women's research found:

- There were over 24 million impressions using the #MeToo hashtag on Twitter between October 2017 and December 2019.

- Every region of the globe engaged in the movement (figure 2) and many developed regional or language specific hashtags (figure 3).

- There was wide international reach – five countries had more than one million impressions each, twenty had more than 100000 (figure 4).

- Analysis of words most often used alongside the #MeToo hashtag illustrate commonalities across locality, such as women, equality, movement, Times Up, rape, harassment. There are also localised specificities – such as references to music and use of emojis.

FIGURE 2
The International Resonance of #MeToo (Twitter)

Canada 654485
Finland 69631
UK 974359
Russia 43120
Spain 1201269
Turkey 50672
Iran 17461
UAE 28016
Nigeria 156271
India 1587549
Philippines 52545
Indonesia 217970
Kenya 43137
South Africa 101005
Australia 259401
Argentina 2415685

FIGURE 3:
The #MeToo hashtag family (Twitter)

#MeToo	#YoTambién	#SendeAnlat (Turkey)	#sdds (Kazakhstan)	#WithYou
#WeToo	#QuellaVoltaChe (Italy)	#AnaKaman (Egypt)	#RiceBunny (China)	#sas (China)
#asdas (S. Korea)	#asce (Macedonia)	#BalanceTonPorc (France)	#Cuéntalo (Spain)	#TimesUp
#TimeisNow	#HearMeToo	#MeQueer	#NiUnaMenos	#MeTooUN
#AidToo	#PremeiroAssedio (Brazil)	#BabaeAko	#WithYou	#SexualHarassment

Are these global patterns a simple reflection of the reach of Twitter?

In 2020 the five countries with the highest use of Twitter are (in order) the USA, Japan, India, Brazil and the UK. The USA has the highest number (20%)[2] of users as well as #MeToo engagement (39%)[3] – its place in the movement is key. The next level of rankings do not, however, exactly mirror Twitter user coverage: after the USA come Argentina, India, Japan and Spain.

Twitter allows users to note their sex or gender in their profiles but the reliability of this information is not absolute, rendering commentary inconclusive. One third of Twitter users are female[4] but they were 58%[5] of those who used the #MeToo hashtag between 2017 and 2019. #MeToo is not a simple mirroring of Twitter user-ship. There was something else happening: patterns that invite us to consider other dynamics such as topic resonance, the value of spontaneous connection in common cause and the role of social media in these connections. UN Women's work is pertinent to these dynamics, including in support of civil society movements, support and advice for policy makers and legislators, promotion of the realisation of human rights and the SDGs as well as the elimination of violence against women[6].

#MeToo has been a global movement. Analysis of regional and national level data shows both patterns and nuances. The discussion in the Nordic (figure 5) region (with the highest gender equality rankings[7]) share similar themes to those elsewhere – women, feminism, sexual violence, assault, equality, gender equality. In East Africa (figure 6) the most used terms alongside the hashtag were equality, movement, and gender (not in order). It is not possible to gauge whether poverty, age, disability or other structures of inequality are associated with the volume or nature of engagement.

FIGURE 4
#MeToo Twitter Impressions by country and UN regional commission – 2017-9

ECLAC (20%)
ECA (2%)
ESCWA (0.5%)
ESCAP (19%)
ECE (59%)
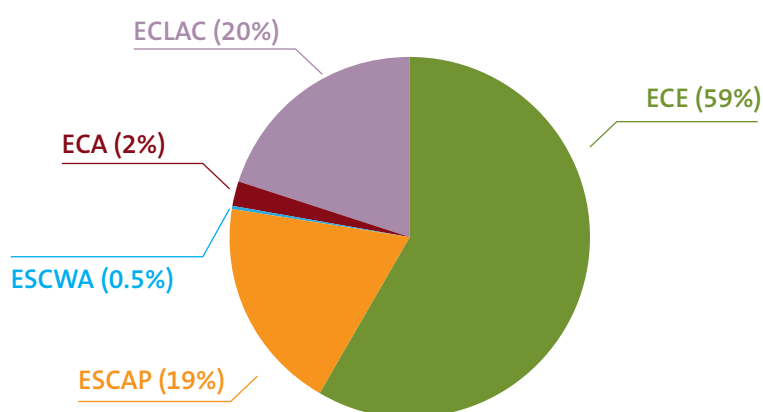
ECA: Economic Commission for Africa
ECE: Economic Commission for Europe
ESCWA: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
ESCAP: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean

> 1.000.000

USA
Spain

India
Japan

Argentina

> 100.000

United Kingdom
Canada
France
Germany
Italy
Sweden
Netherlands

South Korea
Australia
Indonesia
Thailand
Pakistan

Mexico
Brazil
Chile
Peru
Colombia
Venezuela

Nigeria
South Africa

> 10.000

Finland
Republic of
  Ireland
Belgium
Turkey
Switzerland
Russia
Norway
Denmark
Austria
Portugal
Republic of
  Serbia
Poland
Greece
Israel

Philippines
Malaysia
New Zealand
Hong Kong
Vietnam
Singapore
Iran
Nepal
China
Bangladesh

Kenya
Egypt
Uganda
Ghana

United Arab
  Emirates
Egypt
Saudi Arabia
Iran
Jordan

Use of social media allowed people to express their thoughts, their ideas and raise issues of importance to them concerning sexual harassment, including that:

- Sexual harassment and other sexual violence are connected; violence has been an over-arching theme

- Accountability and belief were poorly known

- Solidarity across those who have experienced harassment or abuse mattered – #MeToo is inherently a term of connection and support

- The need to provide representation and legal redress features – TimesUp[8]

What we can't conclude is the presence or absence of intersectional engagement- did individual poverty or wealth factors influence participation? What was the participation and experiences of migrant, indigenous, lesbians or women with disabilities? To what extent were multiple strands of inequality at play in the histories and experiences that emerged?

This is not a definitive or exhaustive story of #MeToo on Twitter or social media more generally.

It is however a glimpse into that engagement that does have some lessons for policy makers, practitioners, activists and donors. There is exhaustion and anger about sexual harassment across the world, and hunger for urgent change. #MeToo was not a fleeting moment but a tidal wave that exposed and decried persistent inequalities, violence and shortcomings across institutions and beyond them. This was not a funded or formally organised movement – it was spontaneous, effective and powerful. It emerged without the participation of states, NGOs or funders. These factors will rightly need reflection as popular agitation against inequalities continues and dynamics of gender equality efforts are reviewed and deepened towards 2030.

Issued by the office of Purna Sen, Executive Co-ordinator and Spokesperson Against Sexual Harassment, August 2020.

FIGURE 5

Twitter #MeToo - most commonly used terms across Nordic Countries (n=10000, 2017 – 2019)

FIGURE 6

#MeToo on Twitter – most commonly used terms across Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, South Africa and Uganda (n=10000, 2017 – 2019)

Endnotes
1 UN Women worked on this research together with Global Pulse of EOSG and researcher Lingzi Hong.
2 https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/
3 This is for Twitter only, not all social media. Current UN Women data review: 24 million total Twitter impressions of which 9.5 million were in the USA
4 https://www.omnicoreagency.com/twitter-statistics/
5 UN Woman data review
6 Further analysis of the data is to follow.
7 See https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality
8 Likely both a call to see the end of sexual harassment as well as a reference to the legal support initiative in the USA – see https://timesupnow.org/about/