International Initiatives to Reduce Gender Bias in News Media

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Introduction

In the small country of Lesotho in Southern Africa, where there are only weekly newspapers, the national office of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), consistently monitors and puts out reports on how the weekly papers report on gender violence; MISA's national office in Zimbabwe trained its media advocacy workers across the country on "why gender and free speech" are two sides of the same coin; and at the regional level, MISA has developed a gender policy and is a key partner with gender and media activities throughout the region to provide gender training to journalists, work with editors and managers to develop gender policies and guidelines and as a sponsor of the region's first gender and media awards to recognize reporting that makes a difference.

MISA is not a women's organization, nor is it a feminist organization. It is a regional organization, with national offices, that fights for a free and independent media, media pluralism

(a diversity of print media and broadcast stations, public and privately owned, within a country) and for the protection of the rights of journalists to report without fear of repression. But the men and women who work within MISA know that the media cannot be "free" and "independent" as long as women who work within the media experience injustices that range from discrimination in promotion and hiring to sexual harassment in the newsroom, and as long as the news is told day in day out through the voices and perspectives of men. These are gender issues.

Gender is the way in which society assigns characteristics and social roles to women and men. The roles, functions and characteristics of men have been given greater value than that of women, creating unequal gender power relations which perpetuate discrimination against women in both the public and private spheres. **Sex** (the biological difference between women and men) becomes the basis for discrimination and the violation of the rights of women and girls in all societies.

Role of Gender Bias in International Media

The role and importance of media is vital in 21st century as media is playing the role of gatekeeper and watchdog. It is an age of globalization and media which influences thoughts, lives, emotions and actions. Males and females are waving together not only the in media institutions in modern age but they are also participating in every walk of life including the police, army, business, law, medical, engineering, aeronautics, teaching, etc. women are part of every field of life in developed and modern societies while their participation is limited in different spheres in the conservative societies where they have to face problems and criticism.

Gender Bias Media, Freedom of Expression and International Obligations

There are several international conventions and declarations that provide a rights-based framework for gender media advocacy, as well as basis for the role the media should can plan in promoting women's human rights and gender equality. These declarations and instruments include:

1. **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** is an international treaty, adopted by the United Nations and ratified by the United Nations and ratified by over a hundred nations, to promote and protect women's right to equality. DEDAW requires that: "State parties shall take all appropriate measures: To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the ideas of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women".

2. **The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA)** identifies the media as a critical area of concern. In section J on the Mass Media, the BPFA recognizes that the media has a vital role to play in addressing the issues of gender inequality, specifically, women's lack of access to media, the fact that women in the industry are generally not in decision-making positions; and the portrayal of gender stereotypes.

3. **Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** states:

- Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference
- Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impact information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of

frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of choice.

Both CEDAW and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right do not explicitly address women's rights to freedom of opinion and expression, but Article 19 read in conjunction with Article 7 of CEDAW affirm this right.

Article 7 of CEDAW which calls on State parties to ensure women, on equal terms with men, have the right to:

- Vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for elections to all publicly elected bodies
- To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation therefore and to hold public office and to perform all public functions at all levels of government.
- To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public ad political life of the country.

Media Monitoring

Monitoring the media is an effective content analysis tool for gender and media advocacy. Media monitoring is one way to keep track of the media's performance on gender. The findings of monitoring can be used to raise awareness among journalists, editors and media managers, as well as advertisers, for the development of gender and media advocacy campaigns and for identifying areas where policy, codes and guidelines need to be developed.

The objectives of monitoring are done occasionally, even though it is a systematic surveillance of media performance for the purpose of its description and critical evaluation. Mostly it generates knowledge about the media by focusing on content. By observing the content, patterns and practices that media professionals use become more accessible. Frequently media

monitoring reveals isolation, exclusion and discrimination – human – made inequalities as oppose to "objective" reflection of the reality of the situation as it is.

The objectives of monitoring can differ. Analysis may be interpretative or quantitative; it may be a special 'case study', it may focus on the language or narrative of news stories; the duration of analysis may be short or long; it can include one medium and single country or it may be comparative. Trends and changes, as well as media employment patterns also can be monitored.

The findings of media monitoring can be documented in short reports and/or fact sheets which can be publicized in the media itself and can be used to challenge the media to change practices which violate women's rights or foster gender disparities and discrimination.

Key Points of Monitoring

- News is a choice, an extraction process, saying that one event is more meaningful than another event.
- Understanding the media's various roles, its power and sphere of influence and the role it can play in bringing about change are essential for any type of advocacy that aims to change the media.
- The media do not just provide information, education and entertainment. By selecting the types of news stories choice of words and language used, choice of people interviewed to give their views and perspectives, selection of images, etc., the media send messages.
- Gender biases and prejudices in the media emerge through the 'choices' media managers, advertisers, and media professionals make each day. Decisions about who will be promoted; who will not, what will make news; what will not, who will be interviewed; who will not, etc are affected by media professionals "beliefs about where women and men, should be" in a society.

- Good advocacy depends on taking the time to think through how you will work with and influence each of the audiences.
- Central to any approach taken for gender and media advocacy is the need for gender and media activists to engage the media, as oppose to taking an antagonist stance.

Country and Regional Experiences in Engendering Communication and Media Policy

CANADA has one of the most comprehensive systems of gender and media policy, which has evolved out of a partnership between government, the media and non-governmental organisations. The balance between government legislation and industry self-regulation makes this system work.

AUSTRALIA's government, through the Office on the Status of Women, initiated in 1986 a consultation with 26,000 women and found that women wanted the media to portray more realistic and positive images of women. In 1988, the government established the National Working Party on the Portrayal of Women in the Media and two working parties operated until 1993. These parties produced guide lines on exist language, how to report on violence against women and on sexual exploitation in advertising. Changes in government however, have led to concerns among activities that many of the gains made are being reversed.

SOUTHERN AFRICA, where gender and media activism has taken off in the years following the publication of the 2003. Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS), saw in 2005 the launch of the Media Action Plan (MAP) on HIV/AIDS and Gender. MAP brings together a partnership between the media industry, civil society and the international community (UNAIDS, the PANOS institute, for example) to improve the quality of media reporting on HIV/AIDS and gender. One of

MAP's key objectives is to ensure that 80% of media institutions in the region have workplace-based and editorial policies and programs on HIV/AIDS and gender by the end of 2008. The engagement with media houses to develop these policies will begin in 2006.

Canada – "Enforced self-regulation' and public advocacy to transform the media

Canada's approach to gender communications and media policy development is seen as a model. The Canadian system is based on government legislation and the Canadian Charter of Right and Freedoms, which provides that "freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication" is subject to "such reasonable limits… as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society". Freedom of expression, therefore, is not defined as an absolute, opening the way for regulations and standards on program content.

The country also has several regulatory bodies created by government and private media players. These include: the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications (CRTC), the agency responsible for broadcast legislation; the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), created by private broadcasters to promote self-regulation in programming. There also is an Advertising Standards body, the advertising Standards council.

Therefore, Canada's policy environment is enabling for gender and media advocacy because it has:

- A communications policy that acknowledges the negative impact of a sexist media environment.
- A broadcast industry which voluntarily drafted sex-role portrayal guidelines and set up its own industry watchdog to ensure that broadcasters followed the guidelines.

- A regulatory body with the potential power to revoke a broadcast licence if sex-role codes and guidelines are not followed.

Media Watch, Canada, the first organisation set up with the aim of eliminating sexism in media content promoters change through activities grouped into three broad programs –

Advocacy, Education and Research

Advocacy
The public advocacy program encourages the general public to actively take part in shaping their media environment, because the media does care about what their audiences think;

Education
This program makes people aware of how the media operates by building media literacy among the consumers of media and the training of public speakers on media literacy issues; Media Watch trains volunteers as public speakers on media literacy issues. Empowering consumers to critically analyse the media environment and advocate for change is an effective means to bring about change.

Research
Regular studies of both media content and audience opinion are commissioned, and the findings are used to lobby the media industry. Media Watch views research as an important tool in successful lobbying. The results of research studies helped ensure tht gender equity language was included in legislation and guidelines. The gender and media advocacy group uses research to strengthen its arguments with the media industry. Besides media monitoring and other research techniques such as content analysis, Media Watch also conducts audience research. A survey of Canadian women was used to show advertisers that more than half of the women surveyed, "quietly

vote with their wallets by boycotting products whose advertising has offended them".

Engaging the media

Media Watch has worked to foster positive relationships with journalists who may be sympathetic to their message. They then develop a mutually satisfying relationship whereby the orgnisation is able to present relevant up-to-date information to the media.

Media Watch also engage with industry and regulatory bodies, pressuring them to meet their obligations under existing guidelines and regulations on gender portrayal.

The result of this strategy includes voluntary industry codes of ethics and guidelines on sex-role portrayal, violence and advertising.

Formal lobbying is often done by Media Watch and individual members of the general public through the public consultations process established by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the broadcast regular. Media Watch has frequently intervened with the CRTC on issues such as television programming, regulation of the internet, among others. Media Watch often submits briefs on the various issues and advocates strongly for the CRTC to play a strong role as regular and to resist industry pressure to deregulate.

Through its own monitoring of the media and on behalf of the public, Media Watch files complaints to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) when broadcasters are deemed in contravention of the Sex Role Guidelines. The gender and media advocacy group also facilitates consumer complaints to the Advertising Standards Council (ASC) and has been successful in the removal of offensive advertising from the public realm.

Media Regulation in the UK

The free market and free press model may support a lighter touch to media regulation. However, concerns relating to the protection of morals and decency, access to and ownership of the media and other cultural considerations mean that the media in the UK remain journalist also exist relating to the quality of some journalism.

With journalists accused of sensationalism, inaccuracy, bias, trivialization, deception, entrapment and much more besides, and with a public expectation that the profession should be honest, tenacious, independent and accountable, it is perhaps no surprise that the media in the UK are subjected to a heavy regulatory burden.

The UK currently adopts a patchwork approach to the control of the media. At one extreme a number of laws exist which, while addressing some of the concerns relating to the excesses in journalism, also have the potential to act as a constraint on 'media freedom'. The English law of defamation, for example, which is rationalised on the basis of protecting unjustified harm to others, can be said to have a chilling effect on the work of journalists, ad to act as an infringement on freedom of speech. Yet even with such legal constraints, parts of the British press are still driven to distort and sensationalise.

At the same time, the Government can invoke laws ostensibly created to protect national security or confidentiality for its own protection. In addition to the array of laws, a number of statutory, self-and co-regulatory bodies exist in an attempt to balance the needs of industry with the public interest: these have also met with mixed success. Alternative strategies rest, on the one extreme, upon the operation of free market forces, and on the other, in a belief in encouraging and promoting ethical practices. The media, and in particular journalists, may be swift to cry 'four' and argue that regulation serves the Government and undermines their perceived role as

watchdog and fourth estate, yet clearly they too have responsibilities and obligations to society. McQuail (1994) identifies this is a commitment to 'higher goals' such as truth, neutrality, objectivity and accuracy. Laudable though these aims may be they are however, particularly vulnerable to commercial pressure. The remainder of this chapter focuses upon the regulatory mechanisms deployed in the UK and the reader is invited to consider if they are 'transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted') Ofcom consultation document, 2004:4).

Creating the Right Message for the Right Audience

In gender and media advocacy, **one message does not fit all audiences.** The message designed for external actors who develop or administer media policy and legislation will not be the same for policy makers within the media who value their independence looking askance at outside influence.

Determining who the message is for and what you want the audience to do after receiving it is two important considerations for developing advocacy campaign message.

Message development is a direct, simple way of communicating the core objective of the campaign to the respective audiences. Each message should be targeted as specifically as possible, and understanding the audience is crucial to determine the content and language of the message.

Good messages are:
- Targeted for a specific group
- Focused on a specific problem
- Action-oriented
- Simple, to the point and 'attention grabbers'
- Easy to understand – use local languages and common terms
- Attractive and interesting prominently visible
- Repetitive

- Reinforced through the use of a combination of media (multimedia approach).

Messages in gender and media advocacy can best be framed using the key media principles of accuracy, fairness, balance and diversity, and fair representation.

Women see modest gains in world news media portrayal, coverage still betrays significant gender bias.

Women are still significantly underrepresented and misrepresented in news media coverage according to Global Media Monitoring Project research in 108 countries coordinated by the World Association for Christian Communication, despite significant change since the project began 15 years ago.

76% of the people heard or read about in the world's news are male. The world seen in news media remains largely a male one.

The GMMP monitored 1,365 newspapers, television and radio stations and Internet news sites, 17,795 news stories and 38,253 persons in the news in 108 countries with 82% of the world's people.

The report Who Makes the News? The Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 was released today in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, along with numerous regional and national reports.

24% of people in the news are female, compared to 17% in 1995. 44% of persons providing popular opinion in news stories are female compared to 34% in 2005.

- News media show significant gender bias with 46% of news stories reinforcing gender stereotypes.
- 13% of news stories focus centrally on women.
- Women in occupations outside the home are not represented in proportion to their real presence.
- Expert commentary is overwhelmingly male with only one female in every five experts.

- The age of women in the news is mentioned twice as often and family status almost four times as often as for men.

Today female reporters are responsible for 37% of stories compared to 28% fifteen years ago, their stories challenge gender stereotypes twice as often as stories by male reporters.

Gender bias in Internet news is similar and in some respects even more intense than that found the traditional news media.

GMMP – 2010 (Findings)

The GMMP classification system categories news stories under 7 major topic areas and 52 sub-topics. The major topics are: Politics and Government; Economy; Science and Health; Social and Legal news; Crime and violence; Celebrity; Arts and Media, Sports; and the Girl-Child.

The research has found relatively little change over the past 5 years in the hierarchy of priorities of the news media agenda. Stories on politics/government (29%), crime/violence (19%) and the economy (18%) dominate the news agenda. Social/ legal, celebrity/arts/sports and science/health stories lab behind with a average of 13%, 11% and 9% respectively of the total number of stories combined across the three mediums.

Summary of Findings

For stories reported on television radio and newspapers, the percentage of those by female reporters is exactly similar to that registered in 2005, that is 37%.

The percentage of stories by female reporters across all three mediums combined rose until 2005. The statistics for radio are noteworthy for the sharp rise between 2000 and 2005 (from 27% to 45% of stories reported by women), followed by a dramatic 8 percentage point drop 5 years later. The negative

change on radio between 2005 and 2010 accounts for the stagnation in the overall average statistic found in 2010.

52% of stories on television and 45% of those on radio are presented by women.

The average total of stories on television and radio presented by women is 49%, less than half of the total number of stories on both mediums combined, a 4 percentage point drop since 2005 and lower than in 1995 when the statistic was 51%.

More stories on television are presented by older women now than 5 years ago

Five years ago, only 7% of stories by presenters between 50 and 64 years old had female newscasters. Currently, 51% of stories by presenters in this age bracket are presented by women, suggesting a possible achievement by women, suggesting a possible achievement of numerical parity with male presenters of the same age. Supplementary research is necessary in order to confirm whether this is indeed the case.

As well, the percentage of stories by female reporters in the older age brackets has increased. The proportion of stories by women in the cluster of reporters between 50-64 years old has also risen remarkably, from 17% in 2005 to 40% currently. Again, supplementary research is essential to conclusively confirm this possible trend.

Since the year 2000 the percentage of stories reported by women compared to those reported by men has increased in all major topic except 'science/health'. Nonetheless, stories by male reporters continue to exceed those by female reporters in all topics.

The changes range between 3 to 11 percentage points, the highest increase being in stories on 'celebrity/arts'. Men report 67% of stories on politics/ government, 65% of stories on crime/ violence and 60% of stories on the economy. The percentage of stories on science/ health reported by women declined sharply between 2000 and 2005 from 46% o 38%, a decline that was followed by an increase to 44% in the

subsequent 5-year period that nevertheless has not been sufficient to bring the proportion back up to the level noted a decade ago.

The statistics strongly suggest that stories accorded high news value by newsroom decision makers are least likely to be assigned to female reporters, while those accorded lowest priority will most likely to be assigned to female reporters.

Foreign and national stories are now reported by women almost to the same extent as local stories.

This situation is different from the period 1995 to 2005 when local stories were more likely to be reported by women than those of a broader scope. 40% of local stories are reported by women, 38% of national stories and 37% of foreign stories. Thus, while the divides between local, national and foreign stories are becoming blurred in terms of the percentage of stories assigned to female reporters, the high reporter sex-gap continues across stories of all scopes.

The statistics reflect an extremely slow rate of progress during the decade towards more gender-balanced journalism.

Gender (In) equality in the news

Slight progress is observed in the proportion of news stories highlighting issues of gender equality or inequality. In 2005, 4% of stories highlighted inequality issues compared to 6% currently.

Some regions have improved remarkably. Latin American is noteworthy for tripling the proportion of such of such stories, from 4% in 2005 to 12% in 2010. North America and the Caribbean were leading at 5% in 2005. They now fall in second and third place respectively having achieved double the figures registered five years ago. The seeming progress in reportage in the Middle East from 1% of stories highlighting (in)equality issues in 2005 to 4% in 2010 may in fact be a truer representation of the region: the rise in the number of participating countries from only 2 in 2005 to 6 in 2010 could

account for the new finding that is close to the 6% global average.

Other region have either stagnated or regressed as in the case of the Pacific that fell 2 points from 3% in 2005 to only 1% currently. The decline in the Pacific however, may be explained by the larger sample size from the increased number of participating countries from the region, in turn suggesting a finding that may be more regionally representative at present.

In 2005 women reported 47% of stories found to raise inequality issues with the remainder 53% being reported by men. These findings are more or less similar to the 2010 research results. In 2005 women reported 36% of the stories that did not highlight an aspect of inequality and male reporters 64%. The status quo is maintained in 2010.

The stagnation in the world averages implies that overall journalistic patterns in reportage have remained unchanged. That said, the regional breakdown shows variations between female and male reporters.

Breaking down the 2010 data by region reveals varying patterns. In Africa, Europe and Latin America, stories by female reporters are more likely to raise issues of gender equality or inequality than stories by male reporters. In Africa 7% of stories by female reporters compared to 4% by male reporters evoke (in)equality issues. In Europe the statistics are 7% of stories by women and 3% of stories by men while in Latin America the findings are 12% and 10% for female and male reporters respectively. The difference noted in North America is statistically insignificant while none at all was found in Asia and the Middle East. The Caribbean region is striking in that stories by male reporters (18%) are to a larger extent more likely to highlight (in)equality issues than stories by female reporters (10%).

Gender stereotyping in the news

The results of the 2010 monitoring are starkly different from those obtained in 2005 in view of the efforts made to develop a shared understanding of the 'stereotypes' concept. Feedback from monitors who participated in the 2005 research revealed that while they were able to identify many more news items that contained stereotypes, they were unable to code properly because of lack of clarity on this question. The question was sharpened in 2010 and pictorial examples of 'stereotyping' added. Considerable training was providing as well as constant, collective virtual and in-person exchanges about the concept, how to identify 'stereotypes' and how to respond to the question. Multi-level training was provided, from a global training workshop, to several regional workshops, to national workshops and the smaller local monitoring teams' training. Given the diversity of 'stereotypes' in different cultural contexts, monitoring team leaders were encouraged to identify and discuss examples exhaustively with monitors in preparation for the coding.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The eight Millennium Development Goals were adopted in the year 2000 as a framework to guide development upto 2015, the target year by which the goals should be achieved. The overarching goal is to reduce absolute poverty by half for the world as a whole, with gender equality and women's empowerment said to be cutting across each goal. The MDG development paradigm however has been the subject of feminist critiques on numerous fronts, among them, the failure to integrate gender perspectives in all eight goals. The GMMP research attempted to uncover, from a gender lens, patterns in media reportage on issues related to the MDGs.

On one indicator of gender-aware media, the research found that only 8% of stories on poverty focus centrally on women, 9% of stories on education, HIV and AIDS (39%), environment (4%) and 19% of stories on global partnerships.

On a second indicator – the extent to which stories highlight gender inequality – the study found only 3% of stories on poverty, education (2%), HIV and AIDS (25%), environment (3%) and 1% of those on global partnerships highlight gender (in) equality issues.

On third indicator, the study found that only 5% of poverty stories, education (5), HIV & AIDS (16%), environment (3%) and global partnerships (1%) clearly challenge gender stereotypes.

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