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**Promoting Gender Equality In  
And Through The Media.  
A Southern African Case Study**

**Colleen Lowe Morna\***

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On 8 October 2002, readers of the respected French newspaper *Le Figaro* are reported to have seen double. They received two versions of the newspaper. One had the usual mix of crime, politics, international upheaval and business. Another covered the same basic issues, but women produced the newspaper from beginning to end.

The feminized experiment edition, called *Le Figaro Femmes* had the same overall layout, but contained an opinion piece about women being sidelined internationally, a story about the male-female wage gap, a profile of United States National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice, the three women candidates for the Argentinian presidential elections in March, and a story on women from Côte d'Ivoire demonstrating against conflict in their country. In short, according to Agence France Press, the paper contained articles "short on violence and long on relationships, gender justice and families."

On 9 October in Johannesburg, where I am based, I received an excited phone call from my husband at about mid morning when he read about the *Le Figaro* experiment in our local "Star" newspaper. "You see," he said, "the work you are doing *is* worthwhile."

The question I have asked myself since then is this: if one newspaper can "feminize" its news for one day, and see the difference, then why can't the news be feminized every day? What effect would that have on the way we see the world, perhaps even on world peace and security? For those of us who are both passionate media practitioners and advocates of gender equality, the *Le Figaro* experiment must surely give us the courage to march on.

In this paper I will try to outline:

- Some of the key issues regarding both the representation and portrayal of women and men in the media;
- Suggest some strategies for addressing these, based on the experience of Gender Links, a Southern African organization that works to promote gender equality in and through the media;
- Suggest some of the measures that might be taken by bodies such as the United Nations to ensure gender balance in the media- beyond the many statements and declarations that have already been made on this matter.

## **Global context**

The media – the twelfth critical area of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action – is one of the most important yet challenging areas of work for advancing gender equality. As "formal" or legislated discrimination against women falls away, the key challenge confronting us is how to change mindsets hardened by centuries of socialization and cemented by custom, culture and religion.

Potentially having a huge role to play in this "liberation of the mind", the media has more often than not been part of the problem rather than of the solution. And, while the media has set itself up as the watchdog of the rest of society, it does not always take kindly to being "watched".

The result has been an unfortunate antagonistic relationship between gender activists and the mainstream media.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the mid term Beijing Plus Five Review, and at other major gender gatherings, the difficulty of persuading the media to take up issues of gender equality has arisen as a major frustration.

Just before the Beijing Conference in 1995, 71 countries took part in the first global media-monitoring project organized by Media Watch Canada. Five years later, before the New York Beijing Plus Five Conference, 70 countries took part in the Global Media Monitoring Project 2000 called "Who Makes the News" that examined how men and women are reflected in the media on one chosen day. The 1995 study found that women constituted 17 percent of news sources. Five years later, this figure had gone up by a mere one percent to 18 percent. Other findings of the 2000 survey are summarized in the table below:

#### **FINDINGS OF THE GLOBAL MEDIA MONITORING PROJECT 2000**

	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
<b>AS PRACTITIONERS</b>		
<b>NEWS PRESENTERS</b>		<b>41 %</b>
<b>NEWS SUBJECTS</b>		<b>17 %</b>
<b>TV PRESENTERS</b>		<b>56%</b>
<b>RADIO REPORTERS</b>		<b>28%</b>
<b>NEWSPAPER REPORTERS</b>		<b>26 %</b>
<b>AS SOURCES OF NEWS</b>		
<b>ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT STORIES</b>		<b>35 %</b>
<b>CELEBRITY NEWS</b>		<b>26 %</b>
<b>POLITICAL STORIES</b>		<b>12%</b>
<b>INTERNATIONAL CRISES</b>		<b>11%</b>
<b>NATIONAL DEFENCE</b>		<b>6%</b>
<b>HOW PORTRAYED</b>		
<b>AS VICTIMS</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>IDENTIFIED BY MARITAL AND FAMILY STATUS</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>21 %</b>
<b>AS NEWS SUBJECTS IN PHOTOS</b>	<b>11 %</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>IN WHAT ROLES</b>		
<b>HOME MAKERS</b>		<b>81%</b>
<b>POLITICIANS</b>		<b>10%</b>
<b>ATHLETES</b>		<b>9%</b>
<b>NO STATED OCCUPATION</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>25%</b>

#### **The Position of Women Working in the Media:**

The Beijing+5 reviews revealed a lack of co-ordinated effort to improve the status of women in the media industry. Women's groups from around the world reported that gender

discrimination in the workplace, combined with a general lack of respect for women's human rights in many cultures, creates barriers for women entering the industry. In many countries, women seeking to enter the media face sexist attitudes, sexual harassment, pay inequalities, discrimination in assignments and promotions, inflexible work environments, and a lack of support mechanisms for working women<sup>i</sup>.

Even in countries such as the USA, where women are the majority of students in journalism courses, only a small percentage of these women go on to work in the media. Many graduates, faced with lower salaries than their male counterparts and lack of opportunities for promotion, opt for jobs in other sectors such as public relations<sup>ii</sup>.

While the numbers of male and female journalists are edging towards a balance, few women are advancing to senior or management levels<sup>iii</sup> giving them limited control over how news is defined or on hiring and promotion practices.

But it is simplistic to assume that merely increasing the number of women in top positions will result in better coverage of women's issues and a more equitable workplace<sup>iv</sup>. Few educational institutions include gender issues in media training curricula, and journalists who wish to cover gender issues or report in gender-sensitive manner are often side-lined by managers and colleagues. Women entering the industry are under considerable pressure to adopt traditional (male) methods of operation<sup>v</sup>.

Women in "developing" nations are finding that whatever their gains in the traditional media, such as print and broadcasting, a lack of training opportunities in new technologies and difficulty in accessing expensive equipment increases marginalization of women in the new electronic media.

### **Key issues in editorial content**

A vicious negative circle is at work. The gender imbalances in society reflect in the institution of the media. These, in turn, reflect in the editorial content of the media that is guilty both of the *sins of omission*, that is, stories not covered; and the *sins of commission*, that is the way stories are covered.

### **"Invisible" women**

In addition to appearing in a limited number of roles, women are often simply missing in the media. They are much less likely to be featured in news stories and less likely to be interviewed and asked for an opinion than men<sup>vi</sup>. Certain categories of women receive even less attention in the media, such as elderly women, and women from minority ethnicities and religious groups, the working class, and women with different sexual orientations<sup>vii</sup>.

Before the Zambian elections last year, one newspaper carried an article entitled "Peoples Wide Expectations of a New President". Every source and image is of a man, and the piece ends with the sub- title "the right man (for the job)" – even though two of the seven presidential candidates were actually women!

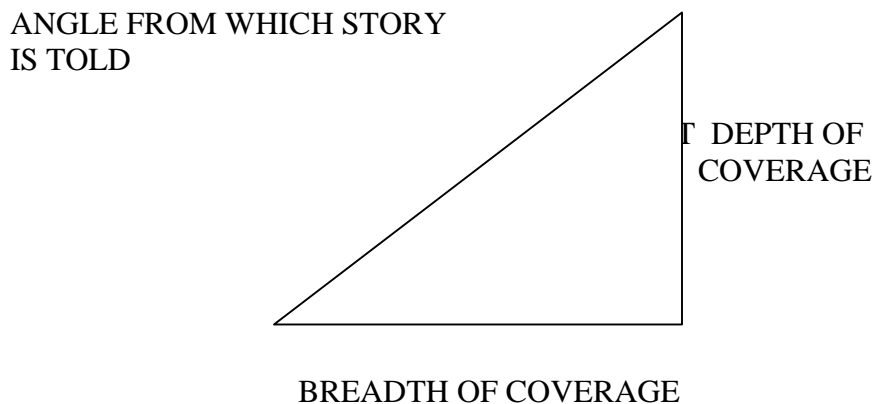
Women are seldom portrayed as politicians, newsmakers, experts, business leaders, and a host of other roles in which men regularly feature<sup>viii</sup> -- even where women have broken into non-traditional jobs and social roles.

This raises the interesting question of what precisely constitutes a “women’s issue”? Why are issues that concern half the world’s population not included in mainstream news? Why is the mainstream news not considered of interest to women? Why are some issues considered “hard” and others “soft”? The answers lie in the fact that the dominant voices in society have defined what is newsworthy and what is not, and these voices have seldom been female.

### The triangular test

To the extent that women’s voices are heard in the mainstream media, or that it covers “gender issues” such coverage tends to be problematic on three counts: the *breadth* or spectrum of coverage; *depth* of coverage including sources and context; as well as the *angle* or approach to covering gender issues.

FIGURE ONE: THE TRIANGULAR TEST FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN COVERAGE



### Breadth of coverage

To the extent that the mainstream media covers “women’s issues” content analyses show that the bulk of coverage concerns violence against women and domestic issues. There is a huge range of missing stories: women battling the oppression of culture and tradition; women as the primary producers of food; traders; proponents of peace; primary providers of unwaged care work in the economy; builders of shattered communities; managers of household resources and so forth. There is little or no coverage of men’s domestic responsibilities- as care givers, parents and partners. To the extent that women are genuinely physically absent from certain categories such as sport and politics, the media seldom raises critical questions as to why this is so.

**Depth of coverage:**

Depth of coverage includes the sources consulted, the extent of investigation and inquiry, and the ability to use a gender lens to uncover hidden stories, context and balance.

**Sources:** Women's voices are seldom heard on key national issues. Each year, our "Star" newspaper does a write up on the one hundred newsmakers of the year. On average, only five to ten of these are women- and they are most likely to be concentrated in the columns on art and entertainment, or "favourite dinner guests".

**Revealing hidden stories:** Most reporting is gender blind: it fails to even see the gender stories. At the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development, one of the most controversial issues at the eleventh hour was an attempt to drop wording on sexual and reproductive rights that some countries said had been agreed but that others disputed. Yet the mainstream media- carrying on about energy and other targets- failed to even see this as a story. A gender aware approach to reporting would actually reveal a host of fascinating stories.

**Persistence and thoroughness of inquiry:** Women constitute the majority of the poor, the unemployed, and the dispossessed. They are not necessarily sitting behind telephone lines, with secretaries or better still public relations officers ready to spin a smooth line for "dial a quote" journalists. Gender aware reporting, like any good reporting, requires that journalists get out of their armchairs, go out and report. As a rule, this is what all good journalism is about. Our news pages and programmes are far too crammed with what the minister says. How does what the minister says affect what happens on the ground- for women and for men?

**Balance:** Many stories on gender issues fail to give a balanced and fair view. For example, research in Zimbabwe found that the voices of women's organizations interviewed on marital rape were drowned by traditionalists who invariably had the last word (Win, 2000). Stories on sex work in our region are almost always told from the perspective of those who believe it is immoral and should be outlawed, despite the fact that a number of women's and human rights groups are advocating that sex work be legalized.

**Angle from which the story is told**

Where women are represented in the media, they tend to be portrayed in ways that are both unfair and inaccurate. Sexualised images of women are rife, and women tend to be defined in terms of their physical appearance, not abilities. When they are not being portrayed as sex objects, women are most often shown as victims of violence and homemakers<sup>ix</sup>. Although the stereotypes of women as care-givers (such as the selfless mother so popular in advertisements) have more positive connotations, they are nevertheless stereotypes, which certainly do not reflect women's complex experiences and aspirations.

There is also an increasing realisation that gender stereotyping is as problematic for men as it is for women. *Boys to Men: Media Messages About Masculinity*<sup>x</sup>, a study published in the USA, highlights the fact that young boys are being bombarded with media images of aggressive,

violent males, and raises questions about the media's construction of masculinity. As with gender stereotypes of women, boys are being offered a very limited definition of what it means to be a man.

The approach taken to stories is another critical test for gender mainstreaming in coverage. This is particularly evident in certain kinds of reporting:

***Women in politics and decision-making*** is one problematic area of media reporting. The following are some observations from a roundtable convened by the Inter Parliamentary Union on the image of women politicians in the media chaired by Birgitta Dahl, the Speaker in Sweden:

- The media can make or break politicians and evidence suggests that women politicians are much more vulnerable than their male counterparts.
- The media carries less coverage of women than of male politicians.
- The media are less open to the achievements of women politicians than to those of their male counterparts.
- The media tend to treat women politicians as women and objects rather than as political protagonists. For example, it is rare to hear or read an interview in which a male politician is asked how he manages to combine political commitments with family priorities, or placing emphasis on his physical appearance rather than ideas or achievements.
- Stories that purport to "sell" often perpetuate gender stereotypes. As much as women politicians need to learn to put their message across better, media need to understand that the integration of women into politics strengthens democracy.
- If the media took women and their concerns seriously, this would help women politicians to develop self-confidence.

## GENDER IN THE 1999 SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTIONS

At the request of the South African Commission on Gender Equality, the Media Monitoring Project carried out a quantitative and qualitative assessment of media's coverage of the 1999 elections in South Africa from a gender perspective. The following were some of the findings:

While it is women who comprise the majority of South Africa's population and largest number of people registered to vote, men are targeted in election news coverage.

Of 6,440 election items, only 42 focused on gender discrimination. Political parties were seldom asked to account for their policies on gender.

Men accounted for 87 percent of news sources in the elections with the ruling African National Congress having by far the largest number of women quoted.

Women politicians were regularly demonized and infantilized by the media. They are branded as "unfeminine" or "iron women"- ruthless, belligerent and doggedly determined.

Male politicians frequently made sexist comments and got away with it. For example on 17 May 1999, *Die Berger* quoted the Western Cape Provincial Minister of Health and Welfare, Peter Marais, as saying: "The Western Cape is like a pretty woman: everyone lusts after her, but not everyone loves her."

Women politicians were regularly identified by their marital and family status, while men were not.

Source: Media Monitoring Project

***Violence against women*** is either not reported at all because it is seen to take place in the private sphere, or reported in bizarre and sensationalist ways that invariably place the blame on the victim. The stories convey no sense of women's human rights being abused. Specifically, coverage of violence against women is fraught with:

***Trivializing issues:*** An example is a story entitled "suspect wets victims bed" and in another "cheeky rapist" in a Zimbabwean newspaper. The two stories were about a rapist who after committing the crime fell asleep on the bed and urinated on it. Another example is a story on Zimbabwean gender activist Rudo Kwaramba, head of the Msasa Project that addresses violence against women, in the *Financial Gazette*. She is referred to as "the woman who runs a secret house in Harare" (giving the impression of something lurid or illegal at the women's shelter). Details of Kwaramba's marriage to her husband are summed up as "a passion she could not resist". The project itself is described as "her band of activists." (Win, 2000).

***Bizarre cases:*** Many stories on domestic violence sensationalise bizarre cases, providing little context or sensitivity towards survivors. Examples from Zimbabwe include the case of a man who almost raped a woman in a crowd in First Street, and the man who almost raped a woman in a bus queue in Msasa. (Win, 2000)



*Blame and exoneration:* Stories on abuse and rape frequently imply that the woman “asked for it to happen” through references such as “she was alone at night” or “she was wearing revealing clothing”. There is also a tendency to highlight the experiences of men as perpetrators rather than women as survivors. “Love” features with disturbing frequency in stories relating to violence against women. It is often cited as the motive of men who kill their partners (femicide). When men go on to commit suicide, the focus tends to be on the suicide, rather than on the fact that they killed their wives or partners. In South Africa, a case of a man shooting his wife in the head when she objected to him trying to feed a meat pie to their infant child was reported under the headline “wife killed after argument over pie.”

*Sex work* is a third example of problematic reporting:

- Stories on sex workers are often veiled in a tone of sarcasm, jest and humour with no regard for the dignity of the person.
- Stories are told in a sensational way. Very few of them convey the problems that these women face.
- Requests for confidentiality are ignored.
- Stories focus almost exclusively on sex workers and not on their clients.

## **Language**

Male domination in society reflects in language. In English, the words “he”, “mankind”, and “the man on the street” are used to refer to all people. While some argue that it is the norm in English to refer to people in general as male, and that this usage includes women, the reality is that the language developed in a society where women were considered inferior and subordinate to men. Language excluded women because women were largely confined to the private sphere of the home, while men operated in the public sphere of political and economic activity<sup>xi</sup>.

While many of the traditional sexist uses of language in the media, such as referring to women by their first names (or their husbands’ names – as in Mrs John Smith) have largely fallen away, language has the power to exclude, and to reinforce patterns of power in society.

## **Visuals**

As we capture and reproduce images, we single out and emphasize what we think is important, underplay or simply ignore other factors, and exaggerate or distort still others. Visual images tend to reflect and transmit some of our deepest beliefs and understandings.

This means that when people make visual images of men and women, they are very likely to rely upon, and to bring out their own deepest feelings about male and female human bodies – which include their deepest stereotypes and prejudices on gender.

## **Cartoons**

All cartoons depend on instantly recognizable characteristics – and thus tend to emphasize the stereotypes. With pictures of men, artists most often enlarge the head, often focusing on the nose, or the pipe, or the lips, or the glasses. With cartoons of women – any women, including ministers, doctors, or other key individuals – the artist too often put in inflated breasts, and exposed legs. Cartoons are often used to trivialize gender concerns: for example the famous cartoon in Kenya's "Nation" newspaper before the Beijing conference showing a woman doing her make up with the caption: "she's not getting ready for a party- she's just getting ready to go to the Beijing conference!"

### **Women as television presenters**

The only professional category of the media in which women predominate is as presenters on television. Presenters are invariably household names and therefore exercise a powerful influence. The physical attributes of women that are emphasized through presenters serve to reinforce gender stereotypes. Invariably, they are slim, glamorous, well presented and articulate- the role model for young women to aspire to. In South Africa we recently had a case of a news presenter dying her hair red. Shortly afterwards she got moved from TV to radio. Rumours abounded that this happened because of her change of hair colour, with headlines such as her bosses "see red". There was no critical analysis as to what underpinned the move, not to mention its legality or constitutionality in the new South Africa.

### **Placement and programming**

Pages and programmes conform to gender stereotypes in our society. Thus, fashion and food sections are aimed mostly at women, and most often reflect women protagonists; while sports and business sections are aimed primarily at, and mostly reflect men. Critical gender stories seldom make the front pages or top news stories.

### **Headlines**

Headlines are intended to capture in a nutshell what stories are about, as well as be clever and eye catching. While accepting these imperatives, it is also a fact that gender stereotypes are pervasive in headline writing- and their effect is often more far reaching than the story itself. In South Africa there has been an ongoing campaign for the president to grant pardon to women who killed their abusive partners. One newspaper carried the headline: "Husband killers seek pardon". Although the story itself gave important details about the abuse that these women suffered, the headline, in one line, set the campaign back by months.

## What is to be done?

*“If newspapers are serious about the representation of women, letting their voices be heard, giving them space and visibility, then they need to go a little further than they are doing now. It is not enough to have a little page filler on some woman. The challenges are more on how to present the stories, the headlines and what they reflect, the amount of space, which gets to speak and has the last word, and the kind of analysis. In summary, it is about access, representation, participation, visibility, space, language and interpretation” – Everjoyce Win, “Missed Opportunities, An Analysis of Newspapers Coverage of Gender Issues and Women in Zimbabwe, January-December 2000.*

Unlike governments that can be made to sign international conventions and then made to account, activists have felt frustrated with the media because they feel a sense of powerlessness over the media.

At best, when confronted with all the arguments above, male media decision makers have taken the simple route out, by creating a page or a programme for women’s issues.

At worst, they have been antagonistic. The private and even the public media claim their independence (at least when it comes to gender!) and hide behind the bottom line. Often, sexist advertising and reporting are seen to be integral to this bottom line, though there is precious little research to back this.

We are also told that the media is simply a mirror of society. If men are the decision makers, power brokers and controllers of the purse strings, then that is what will get reflected in the media.

To paraphrase the late Dr Martin Luther King, this is where we are called upon as activists not to get angry, but to get smart. We need to be able to say to editors: wait a minute. Look at your code of ethics. Is the media only about policy makers, or is it also about the people affected by policy? What about giving voice to the voiceless? And is it true that women are only objects of beauty or victims of violence? Eighty percent of the food in Southern Africa is grown and produced by women. When last did you hear a woman farmer being interviewed on agricultural prices?

Then again, is the media some mindless puppy that is just there to follow, or does it have a responsibility to lead? Does the media simply reflect society, with all its imperfections, or does it also set agendas? In South Africa, a striking parallel is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings on the role of the media in perpetuating apartheid that concluded that with rare exceptions the South African media had blood on its hands for simply reflecting what was: not what should be.

If our reporting is guided by a human rights ethos, if we agree that the media has a role to play in challenging racism, surely we must also agree that it has a role to play in challenging sexism?

What does this mean in practice? To take the example of the Zambian elections cited earlier in which “what the people think of a new president” actually meant “what men think of the new president”, it means not only portraying women as the crowds at an election rally, but also asking what they hope will come out of the elections. It means asking why women comprise less than ten percent of members of parliament. It means reflecting the challenges that the two women presidential contenders face. It means, among the many questions that journalists ask about political manifestos, asking to what extent these reflect concerns like gender violence, teenage pregnancies, the high rate of unemployment and lower economic status of women. Indeed, it means asking why, in our present set up, women vote for men rather than women.

This is not only gender mainstreaming, it is also good editorial and business policy. The fact that corrupt male politicians vie to run our countries is hardly news. The fact that as long as women comprise a mere 18 per cent of all parliamentarians in our region when they constitute 52 percent of our population we have no democracy- that’s news.

Imagine for a moment that we were talking about race or ethnicity rather than gender. Would this not be a source of outcry? So why do we abandon rudimentary news values when it comes to gender? And how do we go about ensuring that media managers and practitioners, men and women, understand that gender mainstreaming is not only good media ethics, it is also good for the product and therefore good for the bottom line?

## **Approaches**

There have been several different approaches to the issue of gender and the media. These include:

- Empowering women journalists;
- Creating alternative media for women’s voices to be heard;
- Seeking to bring about gender balance in the institution of the media as well as in its editorial content.

None of these approaches is mutually exclusive. Each has an important role to play in ensuring a fair representation and portrayal of women in the media. Gender Links has, however, specifically chosen to focus on the latter because:

- In the long term there is no alternative to ensuring that the mainstream media reflects and promotes gender equality;
- We believe that male *and* female journalists need gender training;
- Several organizations- such as the various media women’s associations in Southern Africa- are focusing on the first two of these approaches. We welcome these as important and complementary initiatives. But we believe our niche is to engage with the mainstream media as well as seek to bridge the gap between gender activists and media practitioners.

## Research and policy

Research on gender in the media in Southern Africa is patchy and, at present, mostly emanates from South Africa. Systematic research on gender in the media in South Africa has been a critical tool in putting pressure on media regulatory authorities, media managers and gatekeepers, and even on advertisers, to start taking gender seriously. An important leg of our work has been to conduct research and encourage media houses to craft gender policies in the following ways:

***Gender and Media Handbook:*** In February 2001 GL convened a workshop of media and gender activists that led to the book: “Whose News, Whose Views: A Gender and Media Handbook for Southern Africa Media”. The book was launched on World Press Freedom Day in May 2001 at a gathering of editors to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration on media freedom in Africa. The handbook has been launched at prominent media events in South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, Mauritius, Lesotho, and Botswana. The handbook will soon be translated into Portuguese. One thousand additional copies have been printed by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the main advocacy body for a free press in our region, and are being distributed as part of its advocacy kit to all key media houses in the region.

The handbook has also been used to conduct on-site training for several media houses on request. A key tool in the handbook is the Checklist that is attached here at Annex A. This checklist is mainly directed at media houses, but also includes regulatory authorities and women’s groups. We use this checklist to help all the key stakeholders to think through what they need to do if gender equality is to be achieved both in and through the media.

***Gender and images:*** As a sequel to the handbook, we are working with a regional organization that specializes in photography on a handbook focusing on images. Funding permitting, we hope to complement this with a video.

***MISA Gender Policy and Action Plan:*** At the request of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), GL facilitated a workshop to devise a gender policy and action plan for the region’s main advocacy and lobbying network on issues of media freedom. In November 2001, MISA broke new ground when it adopted a gender policy that states: “gender equality is intrinsic to a pluralistic and diverse media; giving voice to all members of the community; realizing human aspirations as well as freedom of association. It is therefore one of the important indicators for measuring whether each of these is being achieved.” The document continues: “As an agenda setter the media has a duty to portray not just what is, but what could be; to be exemplary in its own practices; and to open debate on the complex issues surrounding gender equality.”

***The Gender and Media Baseline Study:*** As a next step, GL and MISA have launched a major gender and media baseline study - the first comprehensive study of gender in the editorial content of the Southern African media. The project is being undertaken in collaboration with the Media Monitoring Projects in the region, media training institutions, universities, as well as the media women’s associations. Margaret Gallagher, who played a key role in the global study mentioned earlier, is our key adviser for this project that involved intensive monitoring

throughout the month of September. The project, which will result in twelve country reports and one overall regional report, will:

- a. Provide baseline data for monitoring progress towards achieving gender balance in media coverage;
- b. Build capacity in the region for monitoring media content from a gender perspective;
- c. Become a key advocacy tool in the campaign for achieving more balanced and sensitive gender coverage in the media of Southern Africa.

Already, we are planning roundtables in all twelve countries where the research took place to get the media fraternity to engage with the findings of the research, and devise national action plans. The local chapters of MISA will play a key role in this follow up work.

## Training

Training is a critical entry point for mainstreaming gender in the media. GL is working with a number of media training institutions in developing tools for mainstreaming gender in their work, including in-depth resources on specific areas.

***Gender in Media Training: A Southern African Handbook:*** GL and the Johannesburg-based Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) ran a one- year pilot project on mainstreaming gender in key courses offered by the IAJ in 2001 and used this to produce a training manual for media trainers called: “Gender in Media Training: A Southern African Toolkit” (see box).

### GENDER- AN ISSUE IN EVERY MEDIA COURSE

“Women miners toil for R1200 a day”, reads the headline of a front- page article in a South African daily. But, the sub heading goes on, “Pioneers who have broken into a man’s world are not complaining”. Really?

At one level, this story is big news for gender equality. South Africa’s economy is built on the gold mines. Its history of migrant labour-of men leaving women in the rural areas to eke out a living while they live in single sex hostels on the mines-is based on this reality. Until recently women could not go down mine shafts. Their doing so could change the very foundations of our history.

But there is a snag. The only reason that women are being hired is that they are willing to work for lower wages than men. The story is told in a matter of fact way, mainly from the perspective of the employer. There is no critical questioning of the legal and constitutional implications of this blatantly discriminatory act. The several constitutional bodies that South Africa has established to safeguard the rights of all its citizens, such as the Human Rights Commission, the Commission on Gender Equality, and the new Employment Equity Commission, are also not consulted. Only one of the women concerned is interviewed. Her name and identity are disclosed. Is it any wonder that she says she’s happier to have a job than not to have a job at all?

When sixteen journalists from mainstream media attending a course on investigative journalism at the IAJ stopped to think about it, they agreed that this story could and should have been told in a different way.

Through techniques like interviewing the women in private, concealing their identity, and consulting a wide range of sources, the story would in fact have been about the discriminatory practices that still plague South Africa despite constitutional provisions for gender equality- not about how grateful women are to have jobs at any price!

The session on gender in the investigative reporting course formed part of a unique pilot project to mainstream gender considerations in media training conceived by GL and the IAJ, with the support of FES.

The pilot project with the IAJ sought to build a gender perspective into all major courses. A course on race and ethics examined interviews with “people on the street” before and after the budget in one newspaper. In the before interviews, seven people were interviewed: three men, and four women- but three white women and only one black woman (a pensioner). In the after-the- budget interviews, the number of original interviewees dropped from seven to four- three men (two black, one white) and one woman (white, and professional). Fairly blatant examples of whose voices are taken seriously in the new South Africa!

The sub- editing course focused on gender stereotyping in language, headlines and design. For example, on father’s day in June 2001, one newspaper covered a father in Alexandra township Johannesburg, who is challenging the stereotypes of irresponsible fatherhood by caring for his daughter and helping with domestic chores. But the headline reads: “Dad is an ideal mom”- in one line reversing the important message in the story that dad is in fact an ideal dad! Most sub editors had never thought about the subtle but dangerous messages that their shorthand conveys.

An important lesson to emerge from the IAJ/GL pilot project is the effectiveness of reaching media practitioners through mainstream media training. When such practitioners are invited to gender specific courses, typically a handful of women and (already converted) men show up with the result that the trainer is preaching to the converted. The kind of media practitioners who really need such training are much more likely to come to a course on investigative reporting, than to a course on gender and the media.

When unexpectedly confronted with a gender module as part of the course, the typical response is: “this is not what I came here for”! Yet, as evaluations from each of the training sessions showed, for many participants this first ever exposure to gender issues proved an eye opening experience. Examples of comments made include:

- This module opened my world. I was not aware of the subtle nature of stereotyping, how this can be perpetuated through language, religion, etc.
- Incorporating gender into IAJ courses is long overdue. It is most welcome.
- The issue of ethics and gender had never been brought to my attention or to the debating table. Our journalists have never been aware of these aspects. I’ll apply these lessons to change things.

- When we analysed the day's newspapers, I realized that the messages that we send out are quite shocking.
- Made me think about who I am as a journalist, my background and how this influences me.

***Training of trainers:*** GL is a member of the steering committee of SAMTRAN- the Southern African Media Trainers Network. We have participated in an important media training needs assessment of the region, and ensured that the issue of mainstreaming gender is placed firmly on the agenda of this body. We have also conducted a training of trainers workshop using the manual developed with the IAJ, and plan to run two such courses each year.

***Thematic training:*** To ensure in-depth training in key thematic areas, GL each year takes a theme and runs training courses with media training institutions in the region on that issue. By the end of this year, we will have run workshops on covering gender violence in 12 SADC countries and nine South African provinces, that have produced supplements, radio programmes, TV documentaries and have been accompanied by online training. We are currently working on training materials on Gender, HIV AIDS and the Media, and will run a similar set of training courses on this in 2003. Our next theme area is gender and governance. We will run courses to coincide with preparations for national elections in five Southern African countries in 2003/2004. All our training is run in partnership with media training institutions.

***Demonstrating gender mainstreaming in practice:*** Although our focus is on getting the mainstream media to do its job better rather than try to create alternative publications, we do from time to time engage in content creation so as to demonstrate what we mean by mainstreaming a gender perspective in coverage. An example is the daily newspaper that GL produced with its Nairobi-based partner, the African Woman and Child Feature Service, during the WSSD conference. Copies of this are available on our website: [www.genderlinks.org.za](http://www.genderlinks.org.za)

### **Strategic Communications for Gender Activists:**

Much as our primary focus is on the mainstream media, we also believe strongly that gender activists need to learn to position themselves much more strategically where media is concerned. In partnership with the Cape Town based- Women's Media Watch, GL has developed and tested a training manual called "Getting Smart: strategic Communication for Gender Activists." We are currently using this manual to assist NGOs to design campaigns for the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence. These will have a strong mainstream media component. The project brings together our thematic training for the mainstream media on covering gender violence with the strategic communications work. In the future, we plan to target women decision makers, and especially women members of parliament, for our training in strategic communications. We also plan, with our partners in East Africa the AWC, to create a gender commentary and opinion service where we would serve as a bridge between activists and the mainstream media in sourcing outlets for their views.

### **Conclusions- how can the UN Help?**

The UN is an inter-governmental organization. While the UN has the media's respect and goodwill, it has no direct leverage over this important organ of social change. The UN thus also



needs also to “get smart” in its dealings with the media. We at GL submit that the best way to do this is by supporting the efforts of civil society organizations that have the expertise, the linkages, the passion and the desire to assist the media in understanding gender mainstreaming.

The UN also has a critical role to play in sharing best practices from one region to another, and in helping to create the tools for gender mainstreaming in the media. The UN has played a critical role in promoting the concept of gender mainstreaming among governments. Now, in partnership with civil society, it can help to make gender mainstreaming in the media a reality as well.

## **SOUTHERN AFRICA GENDER IN MEDIA CHECKLIST**

### **Gender policy**

- ✓ Do you have a gender policy?
- ✓ Does the policy cover ethical considerations, internal human resource issues and the editorial product?
- ✓ Is it a stand- alone policy; is it integrated in all existing policy documents; or both?
- ✓ Is the policy informed by consultation?
- ✓ Does the policy allow public access and involvement?
- ✓ How is the policy implemented? What are the outputs?
- ✓ Are resources allocated for the implementation of the policy?
- ✓ Is there a high level commitment to the policy?
- ✓ How and where is this commitment articulated?

### **Audit and mapping**

- ✓ How many, and what proportion of men and women are there in your institution?
- ✓ How many, and what proportion of men and women are there in the different levels of your institution?
- ✓ How many, and what proportion of men and women are there in the different beats of your institution?
- ✓ What gender stereotypes are implicit in this distribution?
- ✓ What effect do they have internally, and on the editorial product?

### **Access checklist**

#### ***Affirmative Action Policy***

- ✓ Do you have an affirmative action policy?
- ✓ Is the affirmative action policy prescribed by law or is it your own?
- ✓ Does it spell out precise quotas or targets for male and female representation?
- ✓ Are these broken down by rank?
- ✓ Are there timeframes for achieving this?
- ✓ Is there a plan and resources allocated for achieving this (for example, additional empowerment strategies for women, if required?)?
- ✓ Do you keep regular staff records, disaggregated by gender?
- ✓ Does management regularly monitor and evaluate these?

#### ***Recruitment***

- ✓ Do you advertise using a variety of communication channels, including direct interaction, that ensure men and women are equally reached?
- ✓ Do you actively encourage women to apply?
- ✓ Is there anything in the way your advertisements are phrased that could discourage women from applying?
- ✓ Do you have initiatives to encourage young women to take up careers in the media?

#### ***Selection***

- ✓ Are your selection panels gender balanced?

- ✓ Do you ensure a minimum quota for women in the short-listing process?
- ✓ Do the same standards apply to women and men in the interview process? For example, would you ask a man whether he was married and had children?
- ✓ How are family considerations raised and addressed in the interview process?

### **Participation and advancement checklist**

#### ***Work environment***

- ✓ Do you have any initiatives in place that promote a gender friendly work environment?
- ✓ If someone told a sexist joke at your workplace how would others respond? Would there be any sanction?
- ✓ Do you have a sexual harassment policy?
- ✓ Do you offer flexi- hours?
- ✓ Have you taken advantage of IT to you allow work from home under certain conditions?
- ✓ Do you ensure the safety of all your employees, for example with regard to their transportation to and from work, especially from certain locations and at certain hours?

#### ***Family friendly practices***

- ✓ Do you have a maternity policy in place? What are its provisions?
- ✓ Are there stereotypes in your newsroom concerning the ability of women to perform their journalistic tasks, for example presenting programmes on television while they are pregnant? What have you done to correct these?
- ✓ Do you ensure that the careers of women journalists are not adversely affected by maternity breaks?
- ✓ Do you offer paternity leave?
- ✓ Do you have a policy on breast- feeding?
- ✓ Do you have child- care facilities?

#### ***On the job experience***

- ✓ Is there a gender balance on all your beats?
- ✓ Are women encouraged to go into non- traditional areas of reporting?
- ✓ Are women encouraged and supported to take up technical sides of the job, for example as camerawomen in television or photojournalists in the print media?
- ✓ To the extent that there are physical constraints, for example, the weight of a camera, how have you used advances in technology to overcome this constraint to women's entry into this sphere of work?
- ✓ To the extent that women may be more exposed to danger than men because of their sex (for example to the danger of rape or sexual harassment) while on the job, what measures have you taken to ensure their security? Have you consciously avoided the easy way out- to simply exclude them from that beat?

#### ***Capacity building***

- ✓ Do all your employees have access to staff development programmes, and are these offered at suitable hours?
- ✓ Do you target women for training?
- ✓ Do you have mentorship programmes in place?

- ✓ Are these specifically targeted at women?
- ✓ Does the organization offer assertiveness training and are men and women equally encouraged to undergo this training?

### **Promotion**

- ✓ Do you have a clearly defined and transparent promotion policy?
- ✓ Do you have a minimum quota for women at all levels of the organization?
- ✓ Do you have any measures in place to assist women to achieve these positions on merit?
- ✓ Do you have a roster of potential women candidates for top posts?
- ✓ When you head hunt, do you specify gender as one of the criteria to be considered in sourcing suitable candidates?

### **Gender training checklist**

- ✓ Has the whole organization undergone gender training?
- ✓ What form did this take?
- ✓ Has there been further gender training linked to various areas of responsibility within the organization?
- ✓ Did the training have the support of management?
- ✓ How has gender training been perceived in the organization?
- ✓ What has been the tangible impact of gender training?

### **Gender beat checklist**

- ✓ Is gender awareness and sensitivity built into all reporting requirements?
- ✓ In addition to this, is gender recognized as a specialized beat?
- ✓ Is the gender beat accorded the same status as other beats, such as the courts, political, financial etc.
- ✓ Is the gender beat understood to include both women's and men's concerns?
- ✓ Are there both women and men specializing in the gender beat?
- ✓ Are they afforded the same opportunities as other beats for expanding their horizons and deepening their skills on this beat?

### **Breadth of coverage**

- ✓ Does your coverage reflect a holistic and realistic view of women and do they appear in the full spectrum of activities in which they engage?
- ✓ To the extent that women are missing from certain categories because of their status in society, does the coverage raise critical questions as to why this is so?

### **Depth of coverage**

- ✓ Does coverage give fair and equal space/time to women's and men's voices?
- ✓ Are reporters and editors trained to probe the gender issues that may underlie stories?
- ✓ Are the women who are consulted across the racial and class spectrum?
- ✓ To the extent some women are difficult to reach, is sufficient effort and are enough resources set aside for accessing these "marginal" groups?
- ✓ Are a variety of sources, representing a broad spectrum of views, consulted?
- ✓ Is there a specialist civil society organization on the issue? Has this source been consulted?
- ✓ Is there adequate context and balance?

- ✓ Is the story analytical? Does it go beyond the event and raise the underlying issues?

### **Story angles**

- ✓ Are male and female subjects treated equally?
- ✓ Does your story apportion blame on the subject?
- ✓ Does your story exonerate the perpetrator?
- ✓ Are all subjects treated with dignity?
- ✓ Does the story challenge or reinforce stereotypes?
- ✓ Does it examine the underlying issues?
- ✓ Are these approached from a human rights perspective?
- ✓ Are the experiences and concerns of women trivialized in any way?
- ✓ Is your story fair, accurate and balanced?

### **Language**

- ✓ Is sexist language defined and forbidden?
- ✓ Is language used inclusive of men and women?
- ✓ To the extent that gender- neutral terms are used, is relevant gender disaggregated information provided?
- ✓ Are adjectives used objective and relevant, and do they convey any biases or stereotypes?
- ✓ Is physical description relevant to the story? Does it apply equally to men and women.

### **Visuals**

- ✓ Are women and men equally represented?
- ✓ Over time, does the range of images portray women in all their diversity with regard to age, sexual orientation, class, disability, race, occupation, and urban/rural?
- ✓ Is there a gender bias in how the event is portrayed? Can changing the report reverse or change that bias?
- ✓ Does the media have a responsibility to ask why an area shows gender bias or begin to correct it through affirmative reporting and images? For example, if men's soccer is regularly featured, is there a responsibility to report on why this is predominantly a male game; and of the fact that women's soccer is an up and coming new sport? Would this help to balance gender images on the sports pages?
- ✓ Do pictures reflect women happy with exploitation- for example happy to be scrubbing the floors?
- ✓ Do images emphasize/exaggerate physical aspects (especially sexual)?
- ✓ Would using a different image convey a better sense of the gender dynamics? For example, would a photo of women farmers in a remote rural area be more appropriate than a photo of the male minister of agriculture in a story on farming?
- ✓ For professional women, does the image show a professional role, as opposed to emphasizing the physicality of women?
- ✓ Is the image one of which the person would approve?
- ✓ Are women portrayed as survivors or victims?
- ✓ Are women portrayed as active or passive?
- ✓ Does the image degrade the dignity of women?
- ✓ If you substitute man for women does it make sense?

- ✓ To the extent that women are announcers on television, to what extent are they represented in all their diversity- gender, race, and physical attributes?

### ***Advertising***

- ✓ Is there a discussion in your organization about the need for consistency in standards applied to advertising and editorial?
- ✓ What happens when there is a conflict between the two with regard to gender?
- ✓ Has there been any research to determine what really attracts consumers?

### ***Packaging***

- ✓ Do gender stories make the front page?
- ✓ Do stories written from a gender perspective run through all the pages- news, business, sport etc?
- ✓ Do you have special spaces/ slots for women?
- ✓ Should these be for gender rather than for women?
- ✓ Is the difference understood?
- ✓ Who are you addressing in these spaces?
- ✓ Where are they placed?
- ✓ For audiovisual media, do they take account of the dual roles and time constraints of women?
- ✓ Are they available during prime time when the largest number of men and women are likely to be watching and or listening?
- ✓ Does the headline convey the story or a stereotype?
- ✓ Is dignity and fair play sacrificed for witticism?
- ✓ Are the headline/ caption/ photo/image relevant and related?
- ✓ What are your first impressions about gender when you see the page/ view/ listen to the programme?
- ✓ Does it fit your own experience?
- ✓ What is said about men and women?
- ✓ How do you expect your audience to respond?

### ***Gender structures***

- ✓ Is there a champion for the gender policy in your organization?
- ✓ Is this person at management level?
- ✓ What specific structures have been created for gender mainstreaming?
- ✓ Do these include the human resource, editorial and advertising departments?
- ✓ Is there a committee that includes all three?
- ✓ What informal structures have been created to encourage understanding and buy in? (For example a gender forum, brown bag lunches)?
- ✓ Do they include men and women?
- ✓ Are women encouraged to form support networks and structures?
- ✓ Are these structures accorded respect and status and given time to meet?
- ✓ Do these structures network with civil society?
- ✓ Do you have an internal system to undertake content analysis?
- ✓ Is gender one of the criteria?

- ✓ Does content analysis examine: a) events and issues through the voices of both men and women b) stories highlighting the impact of events on men and women? c) Thematic analysis to ensure that issues covered reflect gender challenges?
- ✓ Does gender feature in readership/ listenership/ viewer ship surveys?
- ✓ Do you conduct focus group surveys to solicit the views of audiences to products? Are men and women equally represented? Are the results disaggregated by gender? Are they acted upon?
- ✓ Are there internal mechanisms for monitoring the overall gender policy including conditions of service and how they impact on men and women?
- ✓ Do you engage with research findings by civil society, private sector and other bodies on the way in which gender is covered by the media, and on sexist attitudes in society?

### ***Government***

- ✓ Do you have gender- disaggregated statistics on access to information in your country?
- ✓ Is universal access to information regarded as a fundamental right? Where and in what way is this expressed?
- ✓ What special policies are in place to ensure that women have equal access to information?
- ✓ Do you have a gender unit in the ministry of information and communication that is specifically charged with this concern?
- ✓ Is the public broadcaster obligated to ensure equal airtime for men and women, and to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all its policies and practices?
- ✓ Is community radio supported and facilitated? Does this reach women? Are women encouraged to run their own community radio stations?
- ✓ What policies are in place to ensure that women have equal access to ICTs and that these are accessible outside urban centres?

### ***Regulatory Authorities***

- ✓ Do you have a definition of sexist complaints?
- ✓ Do you encourage such complaints, and how are they dealt with?
- ✓ Do you engage in public education and awareness regarding gender equality?
- ✓ Is gender one of the considerations in your monitoring of media and or advertising?
- ✓ How are these findings fed back to the media and or advertisers?
- ✓ Have you fully used your “teeth” to require that the media and advertising industries challenge sexist stereotypes? For example, have you considered requiring that media and advertisers report annually on what they are doing to challenge sexist stereotypes?
- ✓ Are best practices on gender mainstreaming in the media and advertising acknowledged and rewarded?

### ***Media training institutions***

- ✓ Do you offer specialist courses on gender?
- ✓ Do male and female journalists participate in these training courses?
- ✓ Are gender considerations integrated into all your training curricula?
- ✓ Do you receive requests for on-sight gender training by mainstream media?
- ✓ Are you able to respond to such requests?
- ✓ How do you measure the impact of the gender training offered?
- ✓ How could this impact be improved?

**Gender activists**

- ✓ Do you have a media and communications policy?
- ✓ Is it a priority in the organization?
- ✓ Have members undergone media/communications training?
- ✓ Are you accessible?
- ✓ Is your information relevant and media friendly?
- ✓ Have you provided the media with a directory of contacts?
- ✓ Have you developed relationships with the mainstream media?
- ✓ Have you packaged the main gender documents e.g. CEDAW, BPfA, SADC Declaration on Gender and Development for the media?
- ✓ Have you been strategic and proactive in networking?
- ✓ Have you lobbied for gender sensitive laws and regulations? Have you highlighted your activities to the media?
- ✓ Have you highlighted critical gender issues through public campaigns to build a media momentum?
- ✓ Do you share resources to ensure maximum coverage of gender issues?
- ✓ Do you take advantage of spaces and airtime for projecting your own views directly, such as opinion pieces and talk shows?
- ✓ Do you have mechanisms for monitoring media from a gender perspective?
- ✓ How is this research fed back to the media?

**ENDNOTES**


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<sup>i</sup> Shivas, M. 2000. *Alternative Assessment of Women and Media based on NGO Reviews of Section J, Beijing Platform of Action.*

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<sup>iii</sup> Williams, D. 2000. "Women still face steep odds in news advancement"

<sup>iv</sup> Prinsloo, J. 1996. "Where are the Women?"

<sup>v</sup> Shivas, M. 2000. *Alternative Assessment of Women and Media based on NGO Reviews of Section J, Beijing Platform of Action.*

<sup>vi</sup> Spears, G. and Seydegart, K. 2000. *Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2000.*

<sup>vii</sup> Shivas, M. 2000. *Alternative Assessment of Women and Media based on NGO Reviews of Section J, Beijing Platform of Action*

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<sup>x</sup> Children Now. 1999. "Study shows that media reinforces gender straitjacket".

<sup>xi</sup> Spender, D. 1985. *Man Made Language.*