SECTION II.
Media Content and Violence Against Women

5. Addressing Gender Issues in Media Content

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INTRODUCTION

In 1995, governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing reached consensus on specific strategic objectives and related actions to advance equality, development and peace for all women. One objective – to "promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media" (Section J on "women and the media", Beijing Platform for Action, 2015) – listed several actions, inter alia, promoting research and implementing an information, education and communication strategy, encouraging the media to refrain from exploitation, sexualisation and commodification of women, and promoting the idea that sexist stereotypes in media are gender discriminatory, degrading and offensive.

Eight years later in 2003, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) recognized "the potential of the media and of information and communication technologies to contribute to the advancement and empowerment of women" (Agreed conclusions, CSW47, 2003). The CSW proposed 24 actions for governments, the UN system, international financial institutions, civil society, the private sector

and other stakeholders. The Commission underlined the need to prioritise gender perspectives in ICT and media policy and regulations, to support research, education and training, to strengthen inter-stakeholder partnerships, to tackle media-based violence against women and to allocate adequate resources. These recommendations and commitments reappear in various global, regional and national gender equality and women's rights frameworks adopted over time (see Table 1).

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 'seek to realize the human rights of all and achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UN General Assembly, 2015). The role of media in advancing gender equality is mentioned specifically in the Post-2015 development blueprint under Goal 5 on enhancing the use of 'information and communications technology to promote the empowerment of women'.

At the same time, it is clear that media are implicated in the achievement of gender equality aspirations in all 17 SDGs, in as far as their role in maintaining social and cultural norms underpinning discrimination and inequality across all thematic areas is concerned. For instance, if media content that channels negative gender stereotypes, belittles, degrades and sexualises women, and normalises gender violence, how could removal of social barriers to the empowerment of girls and women (Agenda 2030 Declaration, para 8), or eliminating gender violence (para 20) be addressed? Media output that clearly challenges gender stereotypes provides the exposure needed to eliminate the prejudices, attitudes, norms and practices that sustain gender-based discrimination, marginalisation and inequality.

The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recognizes the role of stereotypes in 'giving rise to the multitude of legal, political and economic constraints on the advancement of women (Introduction, CEDAW, UN General Assembly, 1979). Article 5 of the Convention obliges States parties to take 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 idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for women and men'. Combatting sexist stereotypes in the media is a necessary part of this process.

TABLE 1. POLICY INSTRUMENTS CONTAINING EXPLICIT GENDER AND MEDIA INDICATORS

Instrument	Indicators
Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)	3.3: States Parties shall adopt and implement appropriate measures to prohibit any exploitation or degradation of women. 12.1(b): States Parties shall take all appropriate measure to eliminate all stereotypes in textbooks, syllabuses and the media, that perpetuate such discrimination.
South African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development (2008)	29.1 – States Parties shall ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all information, communication and media policies, programmes, laws and training in accordance with the Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport and other regional and international commitments by member States on issues relating to media, information and communication.

Instrument	Indicators
	29.2 – States parties shall encourage the media and media-related bodies to mainstream gender in their codes of conduct, policies and procedures, and adopt and implement gender-aware ethical principles, codes of practice and policies in accordance with the Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport. 30.1a - States Parties shall take measures to discourage the media from: promoting pornography and violence against all persons, especially women and children, b) depicting women as helpless victims of violence and abuse, c) degrading or exploiting women, especially in the area of entertainment and advertising, and undermining their role and position in society; and d) reinforcing gender oppression and stereotypes. 30.2 – States Parties shall encourage the media to give equal voice to women and men in all areas of coverage, including increasing the number of programmes for, by and about women on gender specific topics and that challenge gender stereotypes. 30.3 – States Parties shall take appropriate measures to encourage the media to play a constructive role in the eradication of gender-based violence by adopting guidelines which ensure gender sensitive coverage.

Instrument	Indicators
European Union: Roadmap for Equality Between Women and Men (2006)	V. (Elimination of Gender Stereotypes in Society). Key Actions – the Commission will support actions to eliminate gender stereotyping in education, culture and on the labour market by promoting gender mainstreaming and specific actions in the European Social Fund, ICT programmes and in EU education and culture programmes. The Commission will support awareness-raising campaigns and exchange of good practices in schools and enterprises on non-stereotyped gender roles and develop dialogue with media to encourage a non-stereotyped portrayal of women and men.
Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Treaty No. 210) (2014)	III.17.1: Parties shall encourage the private sector, the information and communication technology sector and the media, with due respect for freedom of expression and their independence, to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and to enhance respect for their dignity.
Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women 'Convention of Belem Do Para' (1994)	Chapter III (Duties of the States) 8) (g) encourage the communications media to develop appropriate media guidelines in order to contribute to the eradication of violence against women in all its forms, and to enhance respect for the dignity of women.

Instrument	Indicators
Secretariat of the Pacific Community: Recommendations and Outcomes of 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women (2013)	(74) to recognize that community media and women's media networks are important for collaboration and partnerships; (75) Ensure that government communication and media strategies effectively promote their gender equality commitments; (76) to recognize and fully respect the knowledge held by women; (77) research with gender analysis, on the impact of inappropriate uses of ICTs, and called for the development of national regulatory infrastructure and policy.

EVIDENCE

While state media regulators, media industry bodies and media organizations have, to varying extents, made efforts to translate the global, regional and national commitments into implementable policies, codes and guidelines for the media, the results remain uninspiring. The evidence below is confined to the news media due to the availability of a volume of data gathered over time and across multiple nation states.

Results from Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 20-year research on gender in news media content reveal that the rate of progress towards media gender parity has been very slow (Macharia, 2015):

• Globally, women make up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news. In 20 years, the needle towards parity has moved by only seven points. The gender gap is narrowest in stories on science and health and widest in news about politics and government, in which women are only 16% of the people in the stories.

- As news sources, women appear most as persons providing testimony based on personal experience (38%) and least as experts (19%). Across 10 years, women's voice as experts has increased by only two points.

- Progress towards news representation that acknowledges women's participation in productive life remains elusive. Globally women hold approximately 40% of paid employment, while a large proportion work in the informal sector, particularly in Global South contexts. In the world depicted in the news, only 20% of the total workers in the formal labour force are women, while 67% of the unemployed and stay-at-home parents are women.

- Only one out of ten stories since 2000 has focussed centrally on women. That this proportion has remained constant across almost two decades suggests that women's value as newsworthy has not changed, and perhaps a continued disinterest of reporters, producers and editors in women's lives, stories and experiences. Economic news, followed by political news, are least likely to focus on women, at 5% and 7% of stories in these topics respectively.

- Many stories present opportunities to highlight gender equality or inequality issues, yet, only 9% do so globally. While this number signals a steady rise since 2005, it remains under the 10% - or one in ten – mark. The largest strides in integrating a gender equality perspective have been in science and health news, followed by economic, and crime/violence stories.

- Similarly, many stories present opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes, but only 4% do so, a negligible one percentage point change since 2005. Gender stereotypes have remained firmly embedded in news media output over the past decade. In 10 years there has been no progress in the proportion of political news stories that clearly challenge gender stereotypes, while stereotypes appear to have increased in social and legal news.

- Women's relative invisibility in traditional news media has crossed over into digital news delivery platforms. The roles in which they appear mirror the results from traditional print and broadcast news. Only 4% of news media tweets clearly challenge gender stereotypes, exactly similar to the overall percentage of television, radio and print news stories.

The next GMMP research is scheduled for 2020, at which time the statistics will be updated. The 2020 monitoring will generate new evidence on changes in progress towards closing the gender gap in sources, experts and other indicators of gender equality in news media content.

News is a genre governed by professional codes and can be held to a different standard compared to fictional media. The critique, however, cuts across all media forms that are just as, and oftentimes more, complicit in the sexualisation, trivialisation and objectification of women, as well as the normalisation of violence against girls and women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research evidence suggests that more than two decades since Beijing, gender issues in media content remain pertinent. The power to change lies with governments, the media and ordinary audiences.

Governments need to acknowledge the important place of media and communication within the broader objective of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Professional media, in particular, have a fundamental obligation, following industry ethics, to present balanced, fair and accurate content. Media organizations need to be accountable to the societies in which they operate and the audiences they serve. Gender equality is embraced as a global goal and media have a significant role in promoting or in sabotaging its achievement. Weak and inconsistent implementation of gender policies needs to be addressed. Institutionalisation of a gender-sensitive journalistic culture remains paramount.

Specific **Recommendations** offered by the GMMP Network[25] include the following:

STATE MEDIA REGULATORY AGENCIES SHOULD:

• Require media houses to adopt and enforce an agreed gender policy and guidelines for gender-sensitive reporting.

• Include, in media evaluation criteria, issues of gender balance and demonstrated adherence to the gender policy.

• Impose meaningful fines on media houses found liable of sex discrimination or other actions of non-compliance of their agreed gender policy.

• Build capacity of staff responsible for hearing cases on media non-compliance of the gender policy.

MEDIA SHOULD:

• Develop a gender policy and gender-aware ethics and practice codes, with action plans and targets for implementation.

• Engage with community media organizations and citizens' media networks to advance gender equality in content production.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD:

• Advocate for fair and equal representation of women and men in news media. Lobby for gender policy adoption and implementation for and by media;

[25] *In Macharia, 2015*

• Establish gender focussed media watches and apply the results as evidence for public and media awareness, for actions to hold media accountable through state, industry and media house complaints mechanisms, and to support media houses committed to gender equality.

FUNDING AGENCIES SHOULD:

• Support the strengthening or establishment of media watch networks.

• Support media development work that emphasises gender equality in content production, media in-house policies and practices.

RESOURCES AND GOOD PRACTICE

POLICY

• Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Equitable Portrayal Code (2008)
  http://www.cbsc.ca/codes/cab-equitable-portrayal-code/

• Press Council of Botswana Gender Code of Ethics (2011). A 4-page Code on Equitable treatment of women and men in media coverage; professional accountability; balance, credibility and impartiality in reporting; gender stereotyping and reporting gender-based violence discussed under a general clause on minimizing harm; advertising.

• Tanzania Media Gender Code of Ethics (2009). On accuracy and fairness, balance, credibility and impartiality, accountability, gender stereotyping, language, marketing and advertising, and gender sensitivity within workplaces.
  http://www.mediawise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Tanzania-Media-Gender-Code-of-Ethics.pdf

PRACTICE

- BBC Academy's Expert Women initiative: The BBC Academy's Expert Women initiative aims to address a need to grow the pool of specialist presenters and contributors available to editors and commissioners via a series of training days. Database - http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/collections/expert-women

- The Network of Women in Media, India, is an association which aims to provide a forum for women in media professions to share information and resources, exchange ideas, promote media awareness and ethics, and work for gender equality and justice within the media and society. http://www.nwmindia.org/

- Sancharika Samuha (SAS) is a Forum of women journalists and communicators in Nepal established in 1996 with the objective of promoting a healthier and gender-sensitive media. http://www.sancharika.org/portal/index.php

- The *Learning Resource Kit for Gender-Ethical Journalism and Media House Policy* (WACC and IFJ, 2012) is a two-volume resource for media professionals seeking: (i) to understand how gender intersects with media professional ethics, and (ii) to apply a gender lens in covering news stories on various thematic issues. Book 1 will appeal to media decision makers interested in gender media policy adoption or improvement. Book 2 provides practical guidelines for gender-ethical reporting on various thematic areas such as climate change, disaster and economy. http://whomakesthenews.org/journalism-kit

MEDIA MONITORING

- The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) has, since 1995, documented change in the gender gap in news content at global, regional and country levels, based on indicators such as who appears in print, broadcast and online news and how they are portrayed, who reports the news, patterns in gender stereotyping and women's centrality in news content. The GMMP is also a process of building the

skills of ordinary audiences to monitor the media from a gender perspective and to apply the evidence to advocacy for gender-sensitive media policies, regulation and practice. http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp

• Adaptable gender-focussed media monitoring tools.
  http://whomakesthenews.org/media-monitoring/methodology-guides-and-coding-tools

ADVOCACY

• New York Declaration: A Feminist Vision for the Media – Statement and Plan of Action (2017)

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