

MEDIA GOVERNORS AND TRAINERS DISCUSS HOW UGANDAN MEDIA CAN UPHOLD THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

Journalists often fail to adopt a comprehensive approach in reporting women's rights abuses. Even in the absence of such abuses, the media often fail to formulate their broadcast policy to incorporate exclusive women's rights programmes. The prioritisation of profit-making over societal wellbeing dominates media agenda. Many studies conducted on media and human rights mostly dwell on analysing the frequency of women's rights terms, especially in the print media, such as newspapers and magazines. None or few of them centre on an in-depth analysis of television broadcast programmes to find out the possibility of such programmes having an implicit or in-depth treatment of human rights issues. Thus in this article, media governors and trainers discuss what media needs to do as far as promoting and protecting women's rights is concerned.

JOURNALISTS SHOULD INFLUENCE SOCIETY PROGRESSIVELY – DR WILLIAM TAYEBWA, HEAD OF THE JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT, MAKERERE UNIVERSITY



The exclusion of women in the media starts at the conceptual level. In all journalism schools in this country, traditionally the females have been more than the males, which is also true for staff members in journalism departments. At Makerere University, for example, the department is female-

dominated. The ratio of females to male students is often 52:48, maybe because in subjects like literature at high school, females tend to perform better so they are admitted for Mass Communication. So we graduate more females than males but when it comes to prac-

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tice, the dynamics change. It is at that level that the number of females who tend to go for mainstream journalism declines in favour of public relations work. It could be because when they get into newsrooms, the demands of mainstream journalism – running after news – is unfavourable for them.

Journalism depicted as being masculine

There are variations, however. In broadcast journalism, for example, the number of females tend to be equal to that of men. The big variations are in print journalism where there is a disproportionate representation of females compared to males because of cultural attributes and the demands of the profession. Journalism tends to be more masculine so most females who graduate in journalism leave active journalism, especially print journalism, and opt for public relations, corporate communication, advertising and other communication roles.

The trend is also evident at editorial level where there are more male editors than females. That is changing, though. More females are getting into editorial positions. For example, Daily Monitor and New Vision newspapers have women as some of their top editors. At teaching level, we are doing something about it. We have since introduced a course on gender in the media to encourage female students to take on journalism as a career as op-

posed to the 'soft' professions.

Cultural biases against women

I have seen studies showing that indeed females in mainstream media are depicted as weak or in their traditional roles as women who cook and look after children. When a woman comes out strong like, for example, (Hon. Miria) Matembe, some people will say that is not a woman. Or if it is a female engineer at work in the trenches, they will say that is not a woman's role. So we are still culturally fixated. There are still cultural biases and stereotypes. In advertising, for example, people seem mesmerised by the female body.



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The females are sexualised. When it is a male being portrayed, it is about his muscles, but thighs for a female.

So social media blows up what is in the mainstream media. On social media, there is demeaning of the female body. Nobody seems to care about a man's nude pictures, but women's go viral. But why when actually in such cases, oftentimes a man is involved? Why is the focus on the woman alone?

Journalists should influence society progressively

One may say the problem is maybe with the journalists (who report the stories), but you must also remember journalists are socially situated individuals. A journalist is not so separate from the society where he or she belongs so if a society depicts women in a certain way, which may be ingrained in him, a journalist will do the same, sometimes without realising it. However, we have to be deliberate in our training to ensure we disaggregate these issues so that both men and women journalists are aware and avoid stereotyping women. Journalists have a big role of shaping the story. Journalists set the agenda so, though we come from society, we can influence society progressively. We can reverse the socio-cultural stereotypes.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA SHOULD BE A NATIONAL CONVERSATION –

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There are two key angles to the question of women in the media: one, how they are covered (or not covered) and two, how they are represented in the industry. I believe women are still marginalised on both fronts. For instance, ACME's monitoring of media coverage of the 2016 elections persistently showed that women constituted only between 12 and 18% of the sources of political news. This is true in most other areas of public affairs. Also, women remain underrepresented in most of the country's newsrooms.

However I wouldn't say they are excluded. Rather they are underrepresented. It is difficult to prove women are excluded. You would have to do research on the representation of women in the media, for example on the front pages of the newspapers, in political and public affairs news. That is when you can with certainty state whether or not women are presented as authoritative sources or merely as victims. However, going by my gut feeling and anecdotal evidence,

I also think there has been some improvement on both fronts.

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all citizens must make the issue of voice and representation of women in the media part of the national conversation facilitated by both mainstream and social media. I think the Twitter hashtag #AllMalePanels, for instance, serves as a good reminder of the underrepresentation of women in formal public debate. This is because patriarchy is so deeply entrenched. Yes, there are women who actually are thriving in the media. Perhaps they are the exception.

For inclusion and proper representation of women in the media to take effect, the issue should remain part of the national conversation. All stakeholders should continue shining the torchlight on it.

SOMETIMES WHAT WE CRITIQUE IN THE MEDIA IS WHAT ACTUALLY WOMEN WANT – DR PATRICIA LITHO, BOARD CHAIR, UGANDA WOMEN’S MEDIA ASSOCIATION OF UGANDA



I do media research on how communication can be used to improve the livelihood and wellbeing of women. It is a challenging situation. It looks like everybody was against women from the start, so everything was done against women. Generally women are still represented in the media as weak and vulnerable, and victims whose hands we have to hold. The media needs to do more about the positive portrayal of women in a way that encourages women to develop the I-can-do-that-too mindset. We have a lot of women who have made it with or without affirmative action but we do not see them projected in that light. We have pullouts for women in newspapers but what do we see therein? Makeup, how to win him, make him happy, cook and things like that. Yes, women love those things but women know that already. Aren't there other things we need to profile?

Coverage, mindset issues

In the recent national elections, we had female candidates but we never profiled them (in the right way). We should mainstream and balance our coverage of women. Why should

coverage focus on the woman - the wife, or the daughter of so and so, her dress and appearance, yet it is never the same for men? Often it is about what he can offer, what comes out of his head, yet for a woman it is her appearance. Men's faults were downplayed yet for Kyalya (the female presidential candidate), hers were amplified and/or exaggerated.

There is, however, need to work on improving the mindset of women. It should go beyond legislation. There are cultures in society that are good but there are those which add no value and are rather derogatory in nature but you find women clinging to them as custodians. It is a mindset issue that the media needs to set an agenda on changing.

Do we know what actually women want?

However, one should also know that there are different kinds and mediums of media that cover issues differently. Take, for example, social media that presents what actually women want as opposed to what we think women want. Social media shows what we

think women do not want may actually be what they want. Some women use social media for lifestyle or business purposes. A woman may want to open a blog or Facebook account and use her body or nudity for business. She is like 'I will do this and be invited to an event, to usher or do something for business', in which regard it may not be as bad as we may want to believe.

It could also be that she wears her mini-skirt and appears in the media and people go up in arms, 'Eeh woman!' but she tells them, 'Hey it is okay.' That is how she wants to be portrayed. Look at the issues of nude videos in the media; a lot of them are deliberately aimed at making money. So a woman does it and pretends it was accidental when actually it was deliberate. Away from the nude videos, look at women's Facebook pages, the things we criticise in the media are the very things she may actually want to present herself. That is how she wants the world or her friends to look at her. There is no



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Both the media and the women have a problem. For the media, it is lack of capacity in gender issues. Our training doesn't prepare journalists to conceptualise gender and women's issues. There were fields like sports that were male-dominated and coverage was

biased in a way that if a woman won a rally, the headline would be something like 'woman wins a rally'. Why bring her down because she is a woman? Why not say something like 'One of the racers won' without tying it to her being a woman? That is the problem with the media that when a woman makes it, it is depicted as though it was almost accidental that she made it. How often do we bring issues of ratification of treaties that matter to women? We have a Ministry of Gender but having a gender desk is actually not gender mainstreaming. Women's issues are only covered on International Women's Day or those particular days. Can't we analyse these issues further? We don't teach these issues, so as teachers, we are at fault. But luckily after evaluation at Makerere University, we introduced a course on gender and the media to build capacity in gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive reporting in the media. It has been running for two years now.

Empower women, mainstream gender

The women are also at fault. Do we know what actually matters to us? There is a mindset issue. A lot of women are not mentally liberated. You remember the case when Dr Kazibwe (former vice president) came out and said she had been battered by her husband. How come it took her so long before she came out? She had economic power but mentally she must have kept; 'I am a woman; my husband can batter me'.

The situation has improved but a lot still needs to be done. There should be a deliberate policy on gender mainstreaming and the media. The responsibility goes back to the training institutions. Currently the course on gender and the media is optional but should be made mandatory. There is need for more sensitisation and understanding of these issues.

**THE MEDIA IS NOT
DISCRIMINATIVE BUT
INCONSIDERATE
TO WOMEN –
PROFESSOR
NASSANGA GORETTI
LINDA, MAKERERE
UNIVERSITY
JOURNALISM
LECTURER
AND FORMER
CHAIRPERSON OF
UGANDA MEDIA
COUNCIL**

The situation of women in the media in Uganda today is improving. I did two studies in 1994. One was a baseline study on the situation of women in the media commissioned by the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA). Then for my PhD in 2002, I did a study on gender access to information where I studied men and women's access to information, particularly in the rural areas and its implications for development. I had a paper on 'towards a gendered media world'. The situation then was really very pathetic. That is why I say today the situation is improving. Women then were mainly in the lower ranks, such as junior reporters and freelancers.

Few women in the newsroom

Today, however, women are trying



found that the women in the news were 28%. The number of female journalists had also remained the same in 2015 as that from the 2010 survey at 37%. For Uganda, in a 2011 survey conducted by the UMWA and the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), the number of female journalists was 16% (lower than half of the global average of 37%). The women representation is very low, given the fact that the population ratio of men to women is about 49:51.

The low presence of women in the media partially emanates from the kind of stories being reported about most – business and politics – where few women feature. While it is true that some women may be fearful about going out to comment on controversial issues, most times when journalists go out to look for sources, they tend to pick the male sources because it is the men who dominate those positions. If, for example, a journalist wanted to interview a permanent secretary, most likely this would be a man as most of them are men. Another factor is that women have oftentimes been misrepresented by the media. For example, if a woman makes a mistake, and a man makes the same mistake, the woman's mistake will be overblown or exaggerated, so some women tend to shy away from the media because of that fear.

While students are taught to use gender-inclusive communication, when they go out to practise, the environment is not receptive to the practice of the virtues they learnt. It is not easy to change traditional perceptions where in some societies people still think women are of a

to recapture their territory in the media. We have some success stories such as at New Vision and Daily Monitor where some of the top editorial managers are women. It has not been an easy journey, though. Other media houses are struggling. The encouraging trend is that at training level, we are having more women than men. But the problem is the women do not stay in the media because it is very demanding. They end up going for public relations and other communication roles. It is because of the pressure in the media. It is not, however, that women cannot stand pressure but it takes time to adjust and reconcile responsibilities, for example with young mothers who are not supported (at home) so end up failing. Not that the media discriminates against women but it does not take into account the woman's particular needs.

In the newsroom, when an editor sends

out a man or woman to the field, all they want is a story at the end of the day. While that should be so – there shouldn't be favouritism – one ought to take into account the gender roles. The male journalist has the time to look up information from the internet, beef up the story and presents to the editor a good story. A female journalist, on the other hand, has to check on the children at home, pick them from school so, at the end of the day, she may not have an equal amount of time to produce a good story. Not because female journalists do not have the same mental capability but because of the time factor and responsibilities.

The statistics are not impressive

The situation of women reported about in the media is very low, not only in Uganda but globally. The Global Media Monitoring Report that monitored 114 countries, including Uganda, in 2015,

lower status. Being in the news also has diverse angles. Women often appear in the media talking about 'the light side of life', not on major development issues.

Where does the solution lie?

Some journalists should, however, be commended for bringing out women's voices in the media. Journalists need to go the extra mile in looking out for authoritative women sources to comment on issues; otherwise the excuse usually given is failing to find a female expert to comment on the subject. It also demands that editors deliberately ask reporters to include female voices in their stories, to have gender-balanced viewpoints.

The Media Council cannot do much in this area except if there are cases of gender discrimination reported. Uganda being a liberalised economy, regulators give guidance basing on the media laws and policies in place, but it is difficult to enforce such rules in private businesses. For instance, admission to the training institutions is done by the institutions themselves and the recruitment of journalists is done by respective media houses.

Considering that media involves heavy investment, promoting women-owned media houses is not a viable solution to bring gender balance in the media. The basis of alternative solutions lies in economic empowerment of women and changing societal perceptions of women. Once economically empowered, women's voices would get into the media as women would be an integral part of the economic-political players, who form the bulk of the subjects of media coverage.



**WOMEN HAVE
BROKEN THE
GLASS CEILING IN
THE MEDIA – FRED
OTUNNU, DIRECTOR
CORPORATE
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COMMUNICATIONS
COMMISSION**

My assessment of the situation of women in the media is positive. Unlike in the past, where participation of women in the media was limited, there is steady progress of the positive outlook on women in the media. Women have acquired skills and have embraced the various opportunities in the media industry and they are actively involved at all levels. Women have ventured into photojournalism, war and investigative reporting which was previously a male domain. The women have earned what they have achieved.

The assertion that women are excluded in the media is not true. Today, a number of women in Uganda have broken through the glass ceiling to play various roles

in the media, including those that were previously male-dominated. Women are so proactive in driving various aspects of the media and their presence has tremendously gained credibility. In fact, most broadcasting programmes have both males and females as co-presenters, in anchoring, top management and even ownership of media houses in Uganda.

Women are not misrepresented in the media in Uganda today, not at all. The broadcasters are fully aware of the requirement of the Minimum Broadcasting Standards provided for in the Uganda Communications Act which prohibit any broadcast that is prejudicial and not balanced. There is no intentional or deliberate misrepresentation of women in the media today. The media industry has matured and, as such, fair and equally balanced reporting is being observed. The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) would not hesitate to evoke regulatory sanctions against any offending media house if such matter of breach is brought to its attention.

UCC derives its mandate to regulate the electronic media from the Uganda Communications Act 2013. Section 27 of the Act states that no person shall broadcast without a broadcasting licence issued by the Commission. Section 32 of the Act enjoins broadcasters to adhere to ethical broadcasting standards specified in the first schedule to the Press and Journalist Act. Under section 5 (x) of the Act, UCC is empowered to set standards, monitor and enforce compliance with regard to content. In general, the Commission has wide powers in regulating the electronic media.

There are regulations in place to ensure gender equality and mainstreaming in the media, and UCC is playing its regulatory role well. Article 33 (4) of the Constitution of Uganda provides that '[w]omen shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.' Accordingly, the media industry is enjoined by the constitution to mainstream gender equality.

I can say Uganda has been a frontrunner on women emancipation endeavours in the region and probably the continent. This is clearly manifested not only in the political sphere but in other social-economic arenas. In the media space, Uganda compares favourably in the region and beyond on all matters to do with gender equality. We may not have achieved our desired goal yet, but a lot has been realised and much more is to be attained. The 1995 Constitution as amended sets the tone and direction with regard to gender equality. In the media industry, a favourable environment that promotes inclusion and proper representation for women has been created.

There is, however, need for continuous capacity-building to enhance their capacities to harness the opportunities that exist. Enhanced career guidance and empowerment is required to show that the media industry provides an equal opportunity for growth to both men and women.



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