

# WEARING GENDER SENSITIVE MEDIA LENSES

Towards gender balanced management, coverage and portrayal in the Kenyan media



Edited by Maria Nzomo & Ruth Kibiti

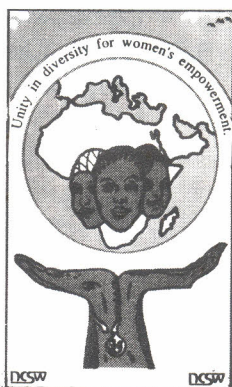


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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
(NCSW)

*Edited by  
Maria Nzomo and Ruth Kibiti*



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We wish in particular to pay special tribute to some participants in this project without whose voluntary services, commitment, and personal sacrifice, this training manual would not have been completed. These include Dr. Ruth Kibiti, who worked with me over several months, doing editorial work and trying to piece together disjointed data into one coherent document. Special thanks also go to Ms. Julie Ongudi - for her administrative support, Mr. Peter Wambu - the Graphic Designer - whose role in this project went way beyond designing and typesetting graphic illustrations; and to Mr. Gichinga Ndirangu, for assisting me with co-ordination of the First Phase of this project. We also wish to express gratitude to our donor partner - DANIDA - for its support and understanding throughout the duration of this project.

Prof. Maria Nzomo  
NCSW Chair, and GSM Co-ordinator  
April 1997

**SECTION I**

**The Introduction**



# WEARING GENDER SENSITIVE MEDIA LENSES: AN INTRODUCTION

## • **Historical Background**

This manual is a follow up of a two-day workshop held in July 1996 on the theme: *Gender sensitization of the media*, jointly sponsored by the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and DANIDA, as part of NCSW's mission of ensuring that media practitioners are sensitized on gender issues, with a view to improving the quality and quantity of media coverage on gender issues.

The workshop participants, comprising of senior journalists and media managers from both the print and electronic media, discussed the role of the media in shaping, propagating and changing societal attitudes in gender relations. Most were in agreement that the media have contributed to the negative attitudes held by the society towards women, through negative portrayal and trivialisation of gender issues.

During the course of the proceedings, the participants reviewed the ways in which the media have been discriminatory against women and how this has led to their marginalisation and subordination. Participants also discussed ways through which the media can change their attitude and approach towards coverage of issues and events to make it gender-sensitive.

The workshop marked the beginning of Phase III of the NCSW Programme on **Gender Sensitization and Civic Education** aimed at removing barriers to the economic and political empowerment of women and democratic development.

The workshop provided an opportunity for opinion-shapers and decision-makers within the media hierarchy to not only present their views on gender relations but also suggest ways in which the power of the media may be harnessed to advance the status of women. It was also an opportunity for practitioners from both the print and the electronic media to share their experiences in coverage of gender issues.

The fact that all the participants were drawn from the media meant that debate and discussions could be carried from a well informed and practical point of view, by persons with first-hand experience of the issues at hand. It also meant that any recommendations made would be coming from key players and stakeholders in the media circles themselves.

By targeting media practitioners and even media managers at policy and decision-making levels, the NCSW hoped, not only to gender sensitize the media generally but also to utilise the influence of such managers, to facilitate the multiplier effect of gender sensitization to the Kenyan population as a whole.

The workshop was therefore aimed at achieving the following goals:

- To define the framework and determine the most appropriate strategies for integrating gender issues into communication research, design and presentation of visual and print media production.
- To establish gender analytical tools for both print and electronic media.
- To develop tools for evaluating gender sensitive (responsive) stories and gender neutral phraseology.
- To consider ways and strategies to increase space and quality for gender news reporting.

## • **From Gender Rhetoric to Gender Sensitivity**

It is quite common these days to hear many men, especially when they are in a predominantly female audience, declare that they are "gender sensitive". This may be the same man, who only the previous



night was battering his spouse as part of his perceived disciplinary functions as “head” of his household. It may very well be the same man who still believes all domestic/household tasks were made from heaven for women, regardless of what other work women perform in public life. He may further believe that whereas his daughter(s) should be allowed to get married when she reaches “marriageable” age, adequate dowry for her should be paid to him, commensurate with the amount of money he has spent on his daughter’s upbringing, education and value added tax. This man may still argue that he is gender sensitive because, he not only attends women’s seminars and listens to women “making noise”, but he has also allowed his wife to go out and work in a public office and he has also allowed and paid for his daughter’s education.

The example cited here may appear exaggerated but it illustrates the point that many gender insensitive men and women these days have jumped on the bandwagon of gender sloganeering, not out of conviction or understanding of the issues at stake, but simply because it is perceived as the most trendy and progressive thing to do. In many such cases, if you pinned down the sloganeer to explain to you his/her concept and vision of “gender” and “gender sensitivity,” you are likely to be told that gender is about women and women’s issues and how women are “fighting men”. In other words, the concept of gender is viewed as a women’s issue, to be worked out and resolved by women. It is also quite fashionable these days to acknowledge that “women’s rights are human rights” even if one does not believe in that principle, let alone understand the full import of it.

In the 1990s, it is not just individuals but also many public institutions, including media houses, who are at pains to defend themselves as being gender sensitive. But the issue still remains whether the structures and processes of decision-making, employment practices, terms and conditions of service of such institutions, reflect gender sensitivity.

Available evidence to-date suggests that in the media, as in other public institutions, negative portrayal of women and gender insensitivity remains a dominant feature of media houses. It is out of this concern that we have prepared this handbook for gender sensitization of the media, in the hope that, henceforth, all of us can begin to wear gender sensitive media lenses. Among the issues addressed by this manual include :

- The concept of “Gender “ and women’s rights as human rights;
- Why , When, How and What gender issues become news ;
- Gender insensitivity and negative portrayal of women in the media; and
- Policy and action that need to be taken to improve quality and quantity of gender coverage in the media.

## ● **Conceptualizing Gender**

This training manual takes the position that to understand gender, one needs first to distinguish between “sex” and “gender”. Sex pertains to the biological distinctions between males and females, which are basically unchangeable and universal throughout all human societies. Gender distinctions on the other hand, derive from a given cultural milieu. They are learned behaviours and preferences that are typically associated with one sex or the other within a given cultural context. As such, gender differences are both variable between cultures and should be changeable over time. But in our African societies, gender relations have been extremely resistant to change.

Gender issues are not simply women’s issues. They are human relation’s issues, covering numerous concerns, including rights, duties and basic freedoms. Thus, when the statement is made that women’s rights are human rights, it is to underscore the fact that human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of governments and societies at large. In this regard, every person regardless of gender, should be entitled, without any form of discrimination, to participate in, contribute to and enjoy cultural, economic political and social development, as provided for in numerous international conventions on human rights.



The problem however lies in that there exists a wide gap between the existence of rights and their effective enjoyment, which in turn derives from a lack of commitment for enforcement by societies, governments and other implementing agencies.

The gender problem is then about Patriarchy. Our African societies are basically patriarchal, characterised by the dominance of one gender - the male gender. It is therefore the male values and ideologies that continue to pervade all aspects of our lives: from the family, local community groups, to national politics and public life in general. The dominance of the patriarchal ideology therefore sets standards as well as shapes and defines gender roles and power relations at all levels of society. In most of Africa, patriarchy and resultant subordination of women to men, is legitimised and perpetuated under the amorphous and ill defined concept of "African Culture/Tradition".

- **Why should we care about Gender Sensitivity or lack of it in the Media?**

If gender issues are given inadequate and /or inappropriate media coverage, if the media portrays women as second class citizens in relation to men, if women are continually portrayed and seen in the mass consumption newspapers as housewives and sex objects rather than workers, this situation not only reinforces the unequal treatment of women elsewhere in the society but saps the energy of those women and men trying to break down the barriers and bring about gender equity and justice.

In this connection, the media while performing its role of informing, educating and entertaining, acts as a powerful medium for shaping public opinion and social attitudes. The media also establishes an order of priorities about society's problems and objectives; selects items for attention and provides rankings for what is or is not important. In this regard, the media sets the agenda for public opinion - and that includes the role of men and women in society. The media therefore can promote or undermine women's rights depending on the degree of gender sensitivity or insensitivity in the coverage and reporting on gender issues.

This is why we care enough to want to contribute to the gender sensitization of the media through training and dissemination of relevant information to the media personnel and public at large. This is one of the key issues addressed in this manual.

- **Why do Gender Issues Fail to Make News?**

It would seem at the outset that most gender related activities do not, in the eyes of the mainstream media, constitute "hard" news that can sell. According to one media manager:

"The absence of gender issues from the front pages of the newspapers is not because women are not active members of society. Far from it, it is because most women have been saddled with or generally involved in activities which because of their ordinariness, do not fit the definition of news which can sell—ultimately, even a gender sensitive editor must select and present news which can sell."

This commercial consideration has also been echoed by various media workers. One has noted:

"It would be pretentious to expect wholesome active objective reports from the media because, for no other reason editorial coverage is largely influenced by a host of factors, foremost among which is—commercial interests, clientele or readers and the outright prejudices of its editors".

Because of this commercial consideration, when a gender issue is given prominence, it may have the effect of cheapening and sensationalising serious issues, some involving gross human rights violation of a woman victim. A case in point is the extensive media coverage given in early 1996, to the woman who was assaulted and stripped by a mob on Luthuli Avenue, Nairobi.



But paradoxically, although in general women fail to make “commercially viable” news, events sometimes make news out of women, but ignore the latter altogether by omitting the gender dimension of such events. For example, news stories on economic growth may be made without mentioning the central role of women in the economy.

## ● **Gender Insensitivity in the Media**

In this volume, numerous examples are cited to demonstrate that the media often fails to convey accurate and balanced gender messages in its print and visual presentations of news and events as well as choice and use of language. Gender stereotyping and negative portrayal of women as sex objects etc., in news captions, cartoon strips, photographs and advertising, in most sections of the media are discussed in this volume

Several citations are made to illustrate this point. For example, at the end of the Easter holiday, a scene of a woman carrying a child and a heavy baggage, and a man walking beside her carrying nothing, are regularly captioned by the print media, as “Nairobians merely returning from Easter holidays”. The gender imbalance and injustice portrayed through the overloaded woman and underloaded man walking beside her, is completely lost through such a caption.

Examples are provided to illustrate gender bias in media reporting on female and male leaders. It is noted that, more often than not, when a male leader speaks on an issue, what he says is likely to be better covered than when a woman leader speaks, unless she is speaking on a highly controversial issue. More importantly, the tendency is to focus on her physical appearance rather than on the issues as a leader she could or may have raised. For example, when Hon. Agnes Ndeti moved to her new office, following her ministerial appointment as Assistant Minister of Education in early 1996, the media highlighted her physical appearance, rather than what vision she had as the first woman Minister for Education in Kenya. A similar example relates to Hon. Nyiva Mwendwa, who is currently the Minister for Culture and Social Services. In her capacity as the only full woman Cabinet Minister, she led Kenya’s official delegation to the 4th Women’s World Conference in Beijing. After her return, most media attention focused on the fact that she took a hairdresser to Beijing, rather than on the contents of the Beijing Platform document that she brought from Beijing. Later, when the same Minister participated in a parliamentary debate on the 1996 ministerial budget speech, the media again focused on her appearance and did not even seek her views on the budget, which some sections of the media wrongly termed as “gender sensitive”. Yet another example is that of a woman who was found to be the leader of a gang of robbers. The local media did not describe her as “a daring dangerous gangster” but as “A fat/stout woman” *Leads Gang*”, conveying the impression that a woman must be physically huge to lead. There are also times when the media portrays women as if they were a separate species from male human beings, as demonstrated in such captions as: “Mombasa Woman Draws Crowd’s Vengeance”, or “Woman killed, Four injured by terror gang.” It should also be noted that when women penetrate the coveted area of “hard” political news, they are often given very skimpy coverage, as compared to their male counterparts and rarely on the front, back or a prominent inner page. For example, in mid 1990, a group of women announced their intention to launch a “women-led party”. This issue was given much less prominence at the back of a leading daily newspaper, than when a group of men in August 1996, announced the take over of an existing, but moribund political party. The latter were given banner front page headlines by the same local daily.

## ● **Is the Media Responsible for Gender Sensitive Coverage?**

Newspaper editors are fond of arguing that the media simply reflects society as it is. This argument was well summarised in a local newspaper editorial in May 1996, which stated *inter alia*:



“The role of the media is to act as a mirror of society. We do not create the bad images and evil practices that we highlight as we go about our duty of informing, educating and mobilising our people for just causes. By holding up the images for all to see, we are not necessarily endorsing them.....To expect the media to shoulder responsibility for the whole of society’s mess is to bestow, too huge a burden on this organ. Accusing the media of promoting what has already been created by society’s failures elsewhere is to say the least, trying to duck the real issues”.

A similar sentiment has been expressed to the effect that,

“media content, whether it is news, features articles, editorials and personal columns, is dictated by events, the forces at play in society, its make-up and overriding needs of its people.”

Media managers therefore view criticism levelled against the media for undercoverage and negative portrayal of gender issues as unfair and unjustified. This manual takes the view that , the media must take some responsibility for ensuring gender sensitivity in its coverage and presentation of news. The media personnel are part of the society they claim to respond to.

## ● **Who then sets the Gender Agenda for the Media?**

Opinions are highly divided on this issue. There are those who feel that the media sets the agenda, as it is the media that is directly involved in the entire process of news gathering, processing and presentation - not to mention critical decision-making of what goes in and in what form, and what gets “killed”. But as already noted, most media managers feel that the public and society at large sets the agenda, as it is their actions that generate the events from which news are constructed.

There is yet another view that for gender news to become news, women as the underrepresented and misrepresented gender, must set the agenda for the media. According to one perspective, women setting an agenda means: doing something newsworthy; doing something considered relevant and significant to the public at large, and in a manner that attracts media attention. In this regard, it has been suggested that women need to learn to exploit media power, by capitalising on topical issues, employing simple and focused methods of presentation, as well as a consistent and non-flamboyant style. In other words, women must learn to package their news in a credible, persuasive as well as portray spontaneity and selflessness.

This is a tall agenda which many women may find difficult to attain although it should be treated as one of several media approaches women should seek to employ. But at the same time, one wonders why the same criteria is not employed to the numerous men who make news everyday. There would appear to be a gender bias and double standard even at this level and an element of exonerating society by blaming the victim.

The proposal therefore made in this manual is that whereas the women’s movement should work out strategies for gender sensitizing the media and pushing for the removal of the negative portrayal of women, the media also has a responsibility to gender sensitize itself, as well as mainstream the gender agenda in decision-making and coverage.

## ● **What then is contained in this manual?**

The rest of this manual is divided into two main sections: The **first section** represents the views of various individuals in the media, representing media house managers, editors and other categories of journalists; both male and female, as well as freelance and private media practitioners and consultants. The **second section** is an attempt to simplify and amplify the major issues raised in the

first section, through a dialogue between fictitious persons interested in unravelling the issues related to gender sensitization of the media.

It is our hope that the issues raised and discussed in this manual will make worthwhile contribution towards gender sensitization of the media and society at large.

Maria Nzomo  
GSM Co-ordinator



**SECTION II**

**Professional's Views**



**Summary**

The paper points out that gender is a new concept which is complex and difficult to operationalize. Gender is a rational concept which refers to the culturally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity. The paper argues that since gender is a new concept which is still evolving, the media could play a crucial leading role by popularizing and disseminating pertinent information on its application and relevance in society.

The paper recognises the existence of gender inequality in society and argues that the real cause of this inequality is patriarchy. It defines patriarchy as the existing unequal power relations between men and women around the world.

The media, the paper observes, must understand gender differences, identify gender stereotypes and differences between gender roles and gender division of labour in society. The paper suggests that for the media personnel and reports to be gender sensitized to the ideas and needs of society at large, the media must comment on the negative socio-cultural trends to provide positive information which can lead to the transformation of society. The media must provide positive information which can influence and encourage societal change. Information is power and the media should play a 'crucial' role in effecting this change. Understanding Gender is simple and also complex. The deeper one probes into political, economic or other socio-cultural interpretations of gender, the more complex and diverse the ranges of opinion prove to be. Indeed, as news, gender becomes part of a dominant culture described by the particular reporter. Therefore, it is impossible to examine gender as news without placing it in some cultural context. Gender is a property of culture. What then is the definition of gender?

**Gender** is a concept that refers to the process by which individuals who are born into **biological** categories of male and female become the social categories of men and women. Thus whereas **sex** is biologically determined, **gender** categories are culturally determined. This transformation occurs through the process of socialization which leads to the acquisition of local culturally-defined attributes of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, gender refers to the socially constructed relationships and roles between men and women. Gender is a relational concept. In fact, Gender has become the standard term for those differences between men and women that are socially constructed. Gender is a useful analytical concept because women cannot be analysed as men. Therefore, gender is a relevant social category for the media personnel.

Gender is a socio-cultural concept which is universal. It is part of society. It is a property of culture, which is dynamic and ever changing. The possibility of transforming gender roles is thus established. Indeed, gender roles are learned over time through the process of socialization, and vary widely within and between cultures. The concept of gender evolved out of a clear recognition that men and women (or boys and girls) play different roles in society and within their communities. Because of their different roles they have different meals. Clearly, since gender is a new concept which is still evolving, the media could play a leading role in popularizing, and disseminating pertinent information on the application of the concept and its relevance in the society today.

All societies from the simplest to the most complex assign some activities to women and others to men. However, male and female roles vary widely from one society to another. Since gender differences are socially constructed through the socialization process they can also be changed by society. Gender entails, on the one hand, men and women's active roles in society and on the other hand, their ideas about maleness and femaleness, what men and women can do and how they are connected and their togetherness in terms of cultural idea and interpretations of those differences. Indeed, the real root cause of gender inequality in society is patriarchy. Patriarchy is an analysis of existing unequal power relations in the world and society. It is defined as men in all societies having an unfair advantage over women.



Gender is not a characteristic of a person, something that women have, while men are men, as many seem to believe. On the contrary, gender and gender identity are socially constructed through the process of socialization whereby human beings become social persons. Therefore, gender relations or the relationship between women and men should constitute the perspective of analysis for the media. Definitely, what men and women do and how they relate socially is an important aspect of gender. Thus, the media should focus on ideas and conceptions which motivate and organise gender roles.

What women and men do and how they behave and interact together with cultural ideas and interpretations of gender differences constitute a gender system. The concept of gender system implies that the different components of gender are conceived as interrelated and influence each other. It is therefore important for media reporters to understand the differences between gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender stratification.

Gender roles are the tasks and activities that a culture assigns to men and women in society. Related to gender roles are gender stereotypes, which are oversimplified but strongly held ideas about the characteristics of males and females. Gender stratification describes an unequal distribution of rewards which include socially valued resources, power and prestige and personal freedom between men and women, which reflect their different positions in a social hierarchy. Indeed, as Ann Stoler (1986:17) has argued, gender status is more equal when the domestic and public spheres are not sharply separated.

The gender approach to human issues emphasizes the importance of examining the gender division of labour in specific societies, particularly the more invisible aspects of women's work, their spatial arrangements and the relation between these labour patterns and other aspects of gender inequality. The gender approach looks at the issue for example of power as it relates to gender and at strategies for empowering women and men and thus challenging the structures and ideas which maintain gender hierarchies. The patriarchal power and domination by men for example, has been one of the most fundamental structuring devices of all societies. Patriarchal attitudes and inequality in power relationships are thus rooted in cultural and traditional customs which account for gender inequality and a resistant to change. The role of traditional and cultural marriage rites such as bride-price, wife inheritance and women's lack of ownership status for example, and their impact on power relations must be explained carefully by the media to influence changes in societies which practise them. The bride-price system places a woman in an unequal position in the marriage and this practice intensifies the subordination of women. Similarly, sex taboos and harmful/dangerous traditional health practices which affect men and women's ability to control their fertility and sexuality must be discussed by the media personnel, by exposing the negative sides to influence changes. In terms of gender relations, the media should comment on these negative socio-cultural trends to provide positive information which can lead to the transformation of society. The media have a powerful influence in society, however, the *status quo* is that the media coverage is also heavily influenced by patriarchal attitudes. The media should provide positive information which can influence and encourage societal change.

In gender training methodologies, two approaches are recommended. First, is the gender roles framework. The gender roles framework provides important data on the distribution of roles and resources within the household. Therefore the media should play a crucial role in effecting this change by focusing on issues and feature stories which advocate for gender equity in society. Attitudes about gender vary in the context of female extra-domestic employment. Gender is flexible and varies with cultural, social, political and economic factors.

There is also the recognition that gender differences vary from society to society and from community to community. Indeed, programmes on gender awareness have recognised these cultural differences and have been sensitive to the needs of men and women with the aim of breaking down the structure of inequality between genders. The objective of gender awareness programmes has been to create gender equity in society.



This variability of gender in time and space suggests that it will continue to change. The media should play a crucial role in effecting this change. The gender roles framework has established that the traditional roles assigned to men and women which included, among others, duties like women cook whereas men work away from home, or women weed and men clear the bush, women sell in markets and men herd animals. These roles of men and women were culturally defined. However, these roles have changed significantly, reflecting changes in the state of their economies. The media could influence the pace of this change by writing about and highlighting them.

The society's perception and attitudes towards gender roles, contributions and responsibilities are often based on cultural value judgements and stereotyping. Women, for example, are often described as weak and cowardly and men are strong and brave. In some situations women are portrayed as being maintained and supported by men who are described as the breadwinners. In other situations, women are described as sexy, marketable and housewives and men are attracted to buy what is sexy, they are the farmers and producers. These are some of the myths about the gender division of responsibilities. The realities are often different, but the fact that society holds these stereotypes becomes oppressive to all. A man who is not a bread-winner is forced to pretend that he is and a woman who is strong (like the Samburu woman who killed a lion) is made to feel guilty and good women farmers are forced to be less industrious. This leads to serious conflicts because of the disparities between the expectations and the realities. The gender roles framework approach is likely to meet less resistance from policy-makers because it focuses more on economic terms and hence it is a language that is unthreatening and widely acceptable.

The media has a role in providing information to change the attitudes, perceptions and opinions of society and in changing outdated behaviour, practices, stereotyping and discrimination. In most cases, the media has always promoted the same stereotypes and out-moded behaviour which society should reject completely. The media rarely accurately reflect female and male relations or men and women's contributions in any given society. When dealing with gender issues, the media must focus on the realities rather than the myths and stereotypes. What is important for the trainers to emphasize is that gender roles specialization has never been complete. Gender roles are always changing, given the state of new technological developments and information available to different people in society through education and training.

The division of roles and responsibilities tend to oscillate according to each sex's ability to cope with its own sphere, and its ability either to tap into the other or to shift the responsibilities. Where the revenues from men's cash crops have dropped, for example, women have had to intensify their productive activities like beer brewing and other market activities to assume many of men's traditional responsibilities. Conversely, women's enhanced earning capacity have encouraged them to make a more significant contribution to household budgeting thus releasing men's contributions which are re-directed to other uses. Thus social change can also be brought about in men's and women's production and division of responsibilities between them.

There is the whole question of women's access and control over resources. Since the unit of analysis for the gender roles framework is the household, then issues of control and access to resources are not problematised. This shortcoming in the gender roles framework is dealt with in the gender social relations framework. Gender analysis is aimed at overcoming inefficient resource allocation which is wasteful instead of synergistic. Clearly, gender analysis identifies gender based division in productive and reproductive work and gender differences in access to and control over income and resources.

The second approach is the social relations analysis. It examines the specific terms under which men and women co-operate and the specific institutions (marriage, household, community, kinship structure, market and state, etc) through which such co-operation is structured. The social relations analysis also takes into consideration other forms of social differentiation including class, ethnicity, age and caste. The analysis also suggests that it is important to examine and take into account both the similarities and differences among men and women. This means that using the social relations analysis it is necessary to assess the importance of a range of factors as stated above.



Indeed, social relations analysis demand a proper understanding of gender relations as there are no simple solutions for overcoming gender inequality. Gender division of labour is understood as a form of social connection in assigning women and men to different responsibilities, activities and spheres and it makes it essential for them to engage in relationships of co-operation and exchange. Media personnel could also use the social relations analysis in their stories and features to influence change and create gender equity in society. The media could consider some salient social relations through which women and men live their daily lives and some of the findings which aid development planners use to tailor interventions in society. In this era of democratization, the media could consider issues around power relations, power sharing between gender and how it can be achieved. The media could even popularize some strategies on how to improve the status of women and even how to provide women with greater bargaining power within this power sharing process. The media, using and integrating the concept of gender in news reporting implies taking account of the different roles, access to and control over resources of women and men and local contexts at particular points in time.

New frameworks like the social actor could be interesting for the media reporters and correspondents. Inherent in this framework of social actor is the notion of the human being as an active subject with the capacity to press social experience and invent ways of coping with life even under extreme forms of coercion. This holds good whether the particular actor is deemed "powerful" or "powerless". It suggests that within the limits of their soci-cultural context, women and men attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in the social events around them and monitor their own actions, as well as observing how others react to their behaviour. Using the social actor framework as a tool for gender analysis, it means that the gender division of roles is responsive to a number of conditions, such as the social characteristics of the household, local community, the position of women and men themselves, the family cycle, kinship position and network, age, religion and ideology.

News analysis and reporting by the media carried out using such a framework would depict women and men as active shapers of their own lives, whether they exploit new opportunities or resist them, or whether they succeed in their pursuits or not. It is also important to emphasize that this view does not imply a disregard of the fact that the constraints on women's and men's actions may be overwhelming and that women and men are often exploited by or subordinated to men. This actor oriented approach does not mean that it is the individual *per se* that is the focus of analysis, but the individual acting in social situations, where the conduct of one influences the conduct of others and vice versa. Thus, even if one focuses on decision-making by the individual woman (or man), this does not imply that their actions can be explained simply by reference to her own dispositions and beliefs. There is need to take into account the various social relationships in which s/he is embedded, both within and outside the family, and not only those present in face to face situations, but also those who are absent but influential both for the actions and its outcome.

This approach will also help the media people to avoid the more deterministic models of gender relation such as Michelle Rosaldo's (1974) domestic / public dichotomy. In fact, the various patterns of control women and men exercise in different spheres of activity do not always translate into concepts of dominance and subordination. The transactional approach considers men and women as social actors who utilize social relations and systems to achieve ends.





# **3 REPORTING ON GENDER ISSUES IN THE KENYAN PRINT MEDIA**

By a former senior male manager of one of the Kenyan main dailies.

## **Summary**

The paper stresses that there is no other way of looking at gender issues except as human rights issues. The issues of poverty and violence against women, deserve better media treatment than that witnessed to date. The traditional **women's page** of some sections of the print media, perpetrates negative attitudes towards women and is a clear manifestation of the negative media portrayal of the female gender. Even film-makers and dramatists tend to portray women as emotionally unstable, indecisive, incompetent, foolish etc; a portrayal which is considered "humour" by an applauding society.

The paper argues that whereas news value should be determined by proximity, timeliness, prominence, human value, consequences etc, the gender aspect of events is often missed. For example, the demolishing of a market, may have gender specific consequences for women, as wives, mothers and breadwinners.

The paper notes that as professionals, women journalists are not well remunerated. Indeed, women professionals are not given prominent decision-making roles, whether as judges, MPs, journalists etc. The paper blames media managers for reducing competent women journalists into fashion writers, and not analysts of national and international issues.

The paper recommends affirmative action to ensure wider participation of women in the media decision-making, and in recognition of the multiple responsibilities of women journalists as mothers, wives and professionals.

The paper also recommends specific efforts be made in the training of journalists to ensure that they are gender-sensitive. Journalists should be trained to look at the "other side", of the story to ensure that it is written in gender-sensitive and balanced manner.

It is further suggested that copy-testers should be trained to be gender-sensitive so that when checking for libel, they also ensure that the contents of their papers have no gender biases.

Media decision-makers should also make sure that actual writing and placement of news items is balanced in terms of gender content and presentation.

The paper also suggests the establishment of a universal professional yardstick for determining what is news, in order to bring to an end the despotism of editors. In this regard, editorial decision-making should be done as teamwork by professionals, to avoid the bad practice whereby, some editors give a news story prominence, merely to please certain influential people in society. The following is the full text of this paper:

## **Introduction**

This paper makes an analysis of the coverage of gender issues in the Kenyan Press from the point of view of both the portrayal of the woman in society as well as her employment in the Media industry. It tries to answer questions of why certain taboo gender issues have not been given as much coverage as they deserve and why the woman is deliberately being left out even when covering issues affecting her life or her activities in life.

Because of limitation of space the paper does not go into details about how gender issues such as forced female mutilation are covered by the Press in Kenya; neither does it examine in details other unfair aspects against women in our society such as polygamy, socialisation, religious beliefs and laws used to subordinate the role of women in society. It however attempts to find out why editors tend to ignore those issues and suggests methods to be taken by Journalists to correct their present negligent attitude towards these issues.



Apart from missing what appears to be major stories about gender issues, media institutions don't seem to be practising fair employment principles when hiring qualified women journalists. A lot of unfair practices appear to be used against unqualified women working in junior positions in almost all media institutions in the country.

The paper also does not deal with the training of journalists because I believe in this aspect of journalism, both men and women are treated equally as they are trained by the same institutions and sit for the same examinations before they come out to face the competitive professional life. However, it is important to note that there is need to increase, through affirmative action, the number of women being admitted into Schools of Journalism. This is the point at which male domination of the media begins.

The importance of sensitizing all journalists at the training stage cannot be overemphasized because when journalists are ignorant of the importance of their role in highlighting gender issues, the entire country suffers as more than half of its citizens are treated as sub-human beings without the majority of the people ever knowing that they are doing anything wrong. It is important therefore, that journalists should be trained on how to cover gender issues and how to present their copy to editors.

Journalists who want to join the film industry are equally important because in African films and drama the role of women in society is misrepresented as well. They are constantly shown as professionally and emotionally subordinate to men. Perhaps it is in African films and drama more than in stories published in newspapers that women are shown as dependent, foolish, gullible, indecisive, deceitful and incompetent. Yet these flaws are presented as being desirable and funny to everyone's amusements!

## **Human Rights for Women**

Gender issues are now being perceived as an important element of human rights for women. Men can no longer be allowed to continue to succeed economically, politically and socially at the expense of women who are left far too behind. They cannot be let to get away with it all by simply saying that behind every successful man is a woman. The woman today would rather not be behind anybody's success but her own. She wishes some men took the trouble to be behind her success for a change. All she wants however is to be at the same level of success with men because she knows it would take a long time before she is allowed to play the leading role. Time has however come when gender issues must be openly discussed through the Press even though, by and large, the mass media remains male dominated.

In the past, indeed until very recently, gender issues were not regarded by journalists, including female journalists, as important enough to warrant front page treatment in newspapers or to be used as first items in Television or Radio news bulletins. The reasons for that are many and complicated but the situation will not change unless we conduct a thorough examination about what determines the subjects covered by journalists, who assigns them and who allocates the space or air time used by the stories once they are written. Needless to say, we may also have to examine how the stories on gender issues are written before they are used by editors as "hard" news stories, features, news bulletins or film documentaries.

That examination will be incomplete without first determining what gender issues are and how to go about making sure journalists in future do not ignore them. Women being part and parcel of humanity, makes it extremely difficult to distinguish which aspect of human existence needs to be highlighted so as to enable us to evaluate women's role in society and whether that role is being given its due respect and recognition. But if we agree that gender issues are basically Human Rights issues then it becomes less cumbersome to list aspects of life which tend to disfavour women or discriminate against them. In the Kenyan context the list can be very long.



## **Poverty among Women**

Though they are the most hard working group, women in Kenya cannot be said to be given a fair opportunity to either earn decent incomes or own property. Despite the hard work they put up, many of them appear to be among the groups with lowest incomes.

Apart from being denied a fair opportunity to make a good income for themselves they also happen not to be given a fair chance to take part in making important economic decisions. There are few of them in the administration and even fewer in parliament, large numbers of their existence as voters notwithstanding. A very small number of them are in courts and in local government. One hardly hears of their representation in big financial institutions.

For these reasons and more, it becomes impossible to see stories about women's poverty as such mainly no one seems to be concerned about their poverty. Journalists writing about economic issues or business stories hardly ever highlight the mistreatment of women in the economic activities of the country mainly because many of them are either gender insensitive or they simply happen to be men writing about male dominated affairs. Business assignments specifically to cover the unfair imbalance against women are not made-hence business pages hardly ever carry stories about the mistreatment of women in this important sector of the country's economy. Past mistakes can only be corrected by sensitizing present business writers to gender issues or better still making sure that women journalists hold important positions in business sections of editorial departments.

## **Violence against Women**

According to a Unesco - conducted research, stories written in Kenyan newspapers depict men and women playing their traditional roles which associate men with strength, leadership, decision-making and independence while women are associated with the very opposite of these characteristics. Stories about violence against women are therefore hardly written by journalists in Kenya mainly because male editors do not assign journalists to cover them or when they are written they are used in the inside pages as fillers since journalists who are insensitive to gender issues do not see them as "news".

Who should determine what is news in modern day journalism? It is obviously unfair to continue publishing front pages stories of male politicians calling each other all sorts of names day in and day out when women are being seriously injured by their husbands as they "instill discipline" into them by physically battering them up without a single word being written in our newspapers about these shameful activities.

To many male journalists, when a politician insults another it is first class news deserving front page treatment, but when a husband causes serious bodily harm to his wife it is simply a private domestic affair unworthy of any publicity. According to Unesco, only a small minority of women in Kenya are considered to be newsmakers; and the exclusion of women from the "news" is of course related to the definition of news. This definition needs to be re-examined if gender issues are to get fair coverage in our newspapers, TV and radio stations.

The problem of lack of coverage about violence against women in Kenya is caused by more or less the same insensitivity of male editors who assign reporters to various tasks. It is also caused by absence of women journalists in decision-making positions in newspapers. Studies conducted in India about the coverage of women affairs reveal a situation which is not very different from what we see in our own country namely:

1. Women are under-represented in general, and occupy less central roles than men in TV programmes and in newspaper stories.
2. Marriage and parenthood are considered more important to women than to men; and the traditional division of labour is shown as typical in marriage.



3. Women on TV are more passive than men. Women are absent from action and adventure programmes or/and from decision making roles.

There is a tendency of depicting women as victims rather than aggressors while their financial and emotional dependence on men and their unwillingness or incapacity to solve their own problems are all magnified.

Poverty and violence against women are two of many subjects which could occupy much more prominent positions on our newspaper pages as well as prime time of our TV and radio programmes. Other subjects ignored by male journalists who are either insensitive to gender issues or lack of female journalist to cover them include forced female mutilation; unequal job opportunities, educational opportunities etc; polygamy and forced early marriages; lack of legal awareness among women victimised by men; cultural and religious beliefs that tend to go against women's human rights; laws being used to subordinate women; health issues which endanger women's lives such as illegal abortions and unequal partnership in marriages.

## **The Traditional Women's Page**

One of the biggest problems for women journalists - and the cause of lack of adequate gender sensitivity among most Kenyan journalists - has been caused, paradoxically, by the so-called women's pages which have been responsible for the subjugation of female journalists at work and the reason for chasing stories of very little benefit to women readers.

Probably stories written by women journalists in Kenya and which are mostly published on women's pages are dull for historical reasons because these pages were started by female European journalists such as Liza Mackiney and Mary Hayne who wrote for European readers. They wrote about European fashions and trends with no African woman in mind. Though African women editors have taken over the publications of these pages, very little seems to have changed in the content of the pages. This seems to suggest that every woman in Kenya is preoccupied with Western-oriented beauty and hair style, cookery and child-husband care.

Attempts must be made to restyle the traditional women's pages both in content and positioning in newspapers so as to give women journalists and indeed male journalists who are gender sensitive an opportunity to write about more important issues concerning the rights of women in society. In this day and age when both women and male journalists undergo the same training and have more or less the same academic qualifications, it is foolhardy to ask women journalists to write for women's pages only and write about dull subjects such as hair styles and the latest shoe fashions.

May be one of the strongest arguments against women's pages is the placement of news about women's issues on these pages which hints to men that this is not their concern. The fact that no gender battle will ever be won without changing the attitude of men does not seem to concern those who are after the continuation of present set up of separate pages for women. Female editors and reporters with the same qualifications as men are now taking a different view of women's pages and they demand that sensitive gender issues should be given as much prominence in newspaper display as any other issue concerning men.

Thirty years ago when the women's pages were being written and edited by European female journalists, African women readers had a problem of dealing with the notion that black woman was "ugly". That, I suggest, was the beginning of use of wigs by black women who, in an effort to look as European as possible, did not care how ridiculous they appeared when they wore blonde wigs which actually made them look ugly. The Press in Kenya, through women's pages played a highly significant role in the promotion and selling of the concept of the Ugliness of an African woman.

Women journalists in Kenya would be doing a great professional job if they exposed that sector of cosmetic industry in our country which is entirely dependent upon the pursuit of European beauty by black women. Certain entrepreneurs in cosmetics and "beauty products" have become millionaires as a result. Yet any serious campaign against commercial products which tend to demean the



African women are likely to face very serious opposition from powerful groups of advertisers who are likely to get the backing of newspaper owners. This is despite the fact that a number of advertisements published in Kenyan newspapers continue to expose Kenyan women to a feministic model whose psychological, physical and material characteristics are derived from Western cultural values system which attempt to imitate European women.

A number of advertisements published in Kenyan newspapers depict women as sex objects and glamour girls just like those advertisement in the Western World. One of the most respected researchers on this issue of misuse of women as advertising "baits" for a number of commodities is Margaret Gallagher who bitterly criticises this reactionary and yet insidiously flattering images which the media present of women-to themselves and to men - as sexually alluring sirens. The advertising industry in Kenya could simply not survive without the use of women as "baits" in the sale of products ranging from cosmetics to liquor and cars.

Strictly speaking, there should be no objection to the use of women, men or children in advertising but the contention comes when women's bodies are used as sex symbols and baits to sell various commodities including condoms. Most advertising in Kenya tends to exploit women in terms of their sexuality and their physical appearance. This trend has been copied from Western publications and TV programmes and has mostly been transplanted into this country unchanged.

Margaret Gallagher's research on portrayal of women in various countries, reveals that men always remain the centre of the women's universe. In Brazil, for example, fictional stories on Television portray women as people who cheerfully, and without any complaints what-so-ever, sail through their domestic chores single-handed on top of a day's work outside the home. When this scenario is brought to Kenya, it ceases being fictional because it is actually a way of life for many working Kenyan women.

In Britain, Gallagher discovered that apart from a handful of female politicians, the only other category of women considered newsworthy is that comprising celebrities. The treatment of women in Britain as "hard" news involves a series of stereotypes concerning physical appearance, domestic role, marital status which portray them as perpetual dependants of men. This British example is the pattern of news selection in Kenyan newspapers, Radio and Television stations. Unless a woman in Kenya is a politician or a celebrity, she cannot expect to appear on the front pages of our newspapers or make a lead story in our radio or television bulletins unless she miraculously took a trip to the moon and returned in a day. When she is talking of the gender issue she will be lucky to make a filler in the inside pages of the newspapers or the last item of the radio or television news in this country.

Gallagher tells us that women in Australia are portrayed in the media as the careful and homely housewives or sex objects or the efficient secretary and the devoted mothers. The story can hardly be said to be different in Kenya. The one country where Gallagher found gender issues being given the media coverage they deserved was in Sweden where newspapers, television and radio dealt with the relationship of women in the labour market. She also found the media in that country being very concerned with the whole country's growing radicalism about women's work in the home and in paid employment. The media were reasonably sympathetic to the role of the housewife whose work was portrayed as hard, time consuming and responsible. The question then arises: If journalists in Sweden can overcome prejudices against women and treat gender issues as real news, why are we not able to do the same here?

## **Negative Media Treatment of Women**

Either because of ignorance on how to deal with gender issues or because of the absence of women in important decision-making positions in the media institutions, journalism in Kenya can correctly be criticized for continued under-representation of women in the hard news columns of newspapers and news bulletins of our Radio and Television.



Apart from under-representation of women in the news presentation in Kenya, there has also been a noticeable ambivalent attitudes to women in the news which are evident in certain stereotyped images in which women are either “good” and “pure” or they are “bad” and “immoral”. Generally speaking this image of women comes across in stories in newspapers or even fiction in books and indeed plays shown on our TV screens. The “good” women are those who are confined in homes taking care of their families and are dependent on men while they show romantic attitudes towards their husbands. The inferior status of women in social, economic and cultural spheres comes out as accepted norms in both fictional characters and actual newsmakers.

Generally speaking, women in Kenya mostly make news as wives, mothers or daughters of men already in the news. They hardly ever make news on their own merit unless, of course, they happen to be part of the man-run or man-benefitting fashionable activities or man-benefitting entertainment business. And as have been pointed out before, the advertising that goes with these fashionable and entertainment activities are usually extremely condescending both in their tone and their unhidden manipulative intentions. The misuse of women as the “bait” through which various products are sold need not be emphasized.

## **The Virgin - Whore Dichotomy**

Either consciously or simply by blindly obeying sociologically established cultural values, the media in Kenya, like those in many parts of the world, continues to portray women through a dichotomous motif which defines women either as good mothers who are tractional or as whores or call-girls who are modern. The virgin-whore dichotomy is more clearly noticeable in fictional portrayal of women in the electronic media in Kenya. In this presentation, the woman is “good” if she is characterized by dependence, ineffectuality, humility and lack of initiative. But she is normally a “Bad” character if she is a career lady and if she is independent and shows a bit of self-control which is not dependent on men.

The most serious question which naturally follows this observation is; Why do some women willingly agree to take part in plays and fictional presentations of programmes which portray them as being subordinate to men? The answer is obviously deeply buried in the inequalities which are within our own cultures. Cultural and sometimes religious explanations are the root causes of gender inequalities and are probably the most difficult for journalists to expose and criticise.

Any journalist with enough courage to criticize a religious or cultural norm which negatively defines the role of women is a crusading journalist worthy of praise. But Kenya has very few of these! Looking at gender discrimination based on culture and religion clearly makes me wonder whether a time has not come for a deliberate campaign to bring about change in some of our cultural values. That campaign ought to be as vigorous as the present democratization movement in our society. Those expected to take the lead in such campaigns must be journalists.

No gender issues can be brought up as major topics in newspapers and in the electronic media without a thorough examination of our ideologies of domesticity and motherhood. The structures of many stories about women are based on the subordinate domestic role of an African mother. The cultural roles of women in the domestic atmosphere of our society must be a subject of critical media examination.

The whole political and economic structures of our entire society need to be examined to see whether they treat women fairly or equitably. Gallagher says in a world where female access to political and economic power is in most cases severely limited, their status and roles are defined within political, economic and cultural systems which tend to exclude them from effective participation. The mass media’s role is primarily to reinforce definitions and identities set in a framework constructed for and by men.

An overriding concern for women, therefore, should be with changes in the political and economic structure. Yet media have been observed to lag behind as an independent change agent. Even if the media in Kenya cannot be expected to initiate change, they can certainly be expected to reflect it.



# Participation of Women in the Media

So far, this paper has looked at the manner in which the mass media in Kenya portray the women in general and gender issues in particular, but to do so without examining the role women journalists play and the condition of their employment as professional people would be only looking at one side of the coin. In examining the gender issues in the Kenyan mass media, it is important to look at both portrayal and employment aspects of women in Kenya.

If the portrayal aspect of the issue looks hopelessly bad, then that of employment can be said to be equally impoverished as the participation of women in media production is still very wanting in this country.

Apart from being numerically fewer than men, women journalists who are already in employment are experiencing an extremely difficult task in trying to climb upwards into editorship or other important positions in the editorial departments of newspapers and other media organisations. The importance of women taking part in defining “news” before journalists are given assignments has already been examined by this paper but the sad news is that it appears as if it will be a long time before women in journalism play that pivotal role in this country.

Apart from that, the morale of women journalists is constantly being weakened by the fact that few of them have the professional independence or autonomy of writing the subjects of their choice. Many of them are forced by male editors to write about the traditional women issues of fashion, motherhood and good housekeeping. Their desire to write about the modern burning gender issues can hardly be fulfilled under these conditions. Their journalistic talents can also not be seen when they are confined to write about very limited subjects. Naturally, if any journalists continue to write about subjects of little interest to the readers, viewers and listeners they can hardly be noticed by their bosses when pay rises and promotions are being considered.

The morale of women journalists is constantly being affected by the attitude of editors towards day-to-day news decisions about *what* to cover and *how* to cover it. Women journalists are sent on uninteresting assignments because it is assumed that they cannot handle aggressive sources of news. This of course has been proved wrong locally by journalists of Catherine Gicheru’s calibre and internationally by journalists like Christian Amanpour who covered the Iraqi war together with Peter Arnett though we only hear of the later as the hero of war coverage.

Because of the equality in educational background of all journalists in Kenya today and the fact that the majority of them go through the same training, it is extremely unfair to insist on giving assignments based on gender even though those assignments have nothing to do with the gender issues.

The few women who were in the profession during my time as Managing Editor preferred to work for the traditional women’s page and my efforts to move one whom I thought could be an excellent general reporter ended up with a resignation threat.

The selection of news under my editorship may have been based on male roles and may have ignored the role of women, while whenever they were involved, a tendency to refer to irrelevant details about their appearance, age and family status was shown. Yet not a single woman journalist complained about this tendency and I believe this was due to lack of people sensitized on gender issues both on the part of male writers of the time and female journalists in the news rooms. The reference of the then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as “The Iron Lady” was common in our headlines yet no one wondered why we made no such descriptions about any male leaders. And women journalists did not raise a finger!

Be that as it may, it is extremely important for all journalists to get equal pay for equal work, but, without equal opportunity this call means absolutely nothing. Occupational segregation which splits assignments into “male and “female” jobs will always work against women journalists who will be omitted from the so called “dangerous” assignments which are invariably a source of front page stories and a stepping stone to higher and more responsible positions which inevitably go with better pay.



# Dual Responsibilities of Women Journalists

Most of women journalists who are also mothers combine the dual responsibility of domestic work and professional assignments. Through my career as a newspaper editor no man ever asked me for permission to go home to either baby-sit or to cook for children - a constant reason for women journalists' absenteeism or early retirement from office and avoidance of working late hours.

The persistent attitude in our society that housework and children are women's rather than men's domain has always worked against women journalists whose chances for promotion are and will continue to be jeopardized by the fact that they cannot work late or they cannot be recalled at night to chase sensitive stories which earn their writers recognition and promotion.

Most women journalists working for the mainstream newspapers in the country are members of the Kenya Union of Journalists, yet very few of them hold any positions in the union and hence the union does not seem to fight for gender issues in the employment of journalists in the country. The percentage of women in the Kenyan Press was said by Unesco in 1981 to be five per cent. That number must now obviously have increased and the union should be even more concerned about the mistreatment of its female members if it is to be credited with being really concerned about the welfare of all its members.

With the number of women journalists increasing, there is no noticeable increase in responsible positions held by women in the mass media. Thus, it is fair to conclude that there is considerable occupational segregation against women. One notices a clear concentration of women in less prestigious jobs in both newspaper and the electronic media where women are not only less paid than men but also where there are less chances for career development and therefore less chances for promotion. A visit to any of the Kenyan media houses would reveal that jobs of telephone operators, secretaries, tea makers and translators are mostly occupied by women whereas men hold top editorial positions. Until today there are no women journalists holding top positions in the Foreign Desk, Business Department, Sub Editor's Desk, Supplements Department or even Sports Departments.

It is therefore not difficult to note that there is segregation against women both horizontally where they hold most junior positions, and vertically where they hold very few top jobs. At the technical level there is a negligible number for women in the country's broadcasting, film or the print media. The reasons managers in these industries give for not promoting women is that most women cannot work long hours or night shifts. But very little consideration is given to the fact that most women working for the mass media in this country carry the dual burden of family and work responsibilities making it very difficult for them to compete with men who have the freedom to work the hours they are assigned to or travel whenever they are demanded to by their assignments.

The only panacea to this serious professional imbalance for women journalists seems to be a demand for a legislation which would protect their rights as mothers and which would make sure there was real equal pay for equal work. Maybe those concerned with gender issues in journalism should be thinking about the introduction of an Equal Pay Act along with a Sex Discrimination Act. Looking at what legal action has done for women journalists in the Western World may encourage feminists to start thinking about taking the whole matter to court to fight for women's rights. Sex discrimination proceedings have been fought and won against such companies as *Reuters* in the UK; *NBC*, *Newsday*, *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post* in the United States. The *New York Times* has avoided going to court by making compensatory payments out of court and by promising to speed up the promotion of women. Kenyan media industries should also be forced to consider the introduction of an Affirmative Action in favour of women journalists, but my fear is that these demands cannot be expected to be made by the male-dominated Kenya Union of Journalists. Maybe the only other solution is to seriously look into the possibilities of professionalisation of Journalism in Kenya. This would make sure all professionals, both male and female, are treated equally by employers.

Professionalisation of journalism in Kenya would also bring about a code of ethics which would also ensure journalists do not use unfair practices to marginalise women in this profession. With a



code of ethics which has seven main pillars, all professionals would be automatically regarded equally provided they have the same qualifications. Because of the importance of the seven principles of journalism, it is imperative to discuss each one of them separately. The principles were first adopted in April, 1923, by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and have since been endorsed by many other journalists.

## **Responsibility**

*This is the right of newspapers to attract and hold readers. It is a right that is restricted by nothing but consideration of public welfare. The use on a newspaper makes of the share of public attention it gains serves to determine its sense of responsibility, which it shares with every member of its staff. A journalist who uses his power for any selfish or otherwise unworthy purpose is faithless.*

Both journalists and newspaper owners are concerned about this principle. No newspaper owner would allow any member of the editorial staff to misuse powers for some selfish reason; yet no editor or journalist of whatever rank should allow himself to be used by the newspaper owner or any other authority for selfish reasons. I happen to know of one famous Kenyan editor who would use his position to fight personal political enemies and, sure enough, in the final analysis, he proved to be faithless to the high office entrusted to him as editor-in-chief.

## **Freedom of the press**

*Freedom of the Press is to be guarded as a vital right of mankind. It is the unquestionable right to discuss whatever is not explicitly forbidden by law, including the wisdom of any restrictive statutes.*

In the past, there have been well known taboo subjects and to a certain extent, there are still some subjects which are regarded as taboo on newspaper pages - subjects like certain individuals' afar accounts and their not-so-legal accumulation of wealth. An educated guess on taboo subjects is that there is a silent mutually agreed conspiracy of silence which requires that such extra-sensitive subjects are swept under the carpet for the benefit of both the owner (his paper must be protected) and the editor (his job must be Protected too).

## **Independence**

*Freedom from all obligations is vital. Promotion of any private interest contrary to the general welfare, for whatever reason, is not compatible with honest journalism. So-called news communications from private sources should not be published without public notice of their source or substantiation of their claim to value as news, both in form and substance. Partisanship in editorial comment, which knowingly departs from the truth, does violence to the best spirit of professional journalism; in the news columns it is subversive of a fundamental principle of the profession.*

As far as promotion of private interests in Kenyan newspapers is concerned, it should by now be pretty obvious to any serious newspaper reader that there are commercial items published as news.

One wonders what readers think of newspapers that print the same picture bearing the same caption together with identical stories and exactly the same headlines word for word! If the episodes leave the readers wondering how journalists from different and, at times, competing newspapers, can come out with such identical stories, they certainly make the marketing and public relations consultants laugh with amusement, as they continue to receive fat cheques from their clients for the free publicity they get.



As a Managing Editor responsible for writing editorials, I knew there was a standing rule that required editorial comment to be written, except in rare cases, on the most significant events of the day. The rule also required that editorial comment, like news stories, contain facts. Editorials were not to be spiteful, prejudiced, propagandist or extremist. Editorials were required to avoid the bizarre and the offensive, and to always maintain a standard of decency and good taste. I was, however, free to criticise government policy both in the editorial columns as well as in my personal column provided the criticism was really necessary and remained objective and responsible.

If anyone calls that kind of guidance from the management proprietorial interference, then, it is healthy interference. I would have hated to be directed by the management to write editorials which were not factual.

Currently, the country is going through a peculiar kind of journalistic liberty which has given way to writing commentaries which are not only partisan but whose "facts" could easily be challenged. Hiding behind powerful godfathers, such writers seem to be able to get away with murder; but whenever they indulge in such unethical activities they are, in fact, doing violence to Kenyan journalism. The only way journalists can effectively convince politicians that there is no need for them to enact the infamous Defamation Act against the Press is to prove that we are responsible.

## **Accuracy**

*Good faith with the reader is the foundation of journalism worth its name. By every consideration of good faith, a newspaper is constrained to be truthful. It is not to be excused for lack of thoroughness or accuracy within its control or failure to obtain command of these essential qualities. Headlines should be fully warranted by the contents of the articles*

No newspaper in the world can claim to be incapable of publishing inaccurate information; but then no newspaper in the world should be forgiven by its readers and the community if it does so deliberately. If we count the number of corrections published daily by the local media, we can get a rough idea of the concern of the owners of the two newspapers about this important aspect of journalism upon which sincerity and truthfulness depends.

A journalist who does not respect accuracy in his profession does not remain in the profession for long unless, of course, he is employed as a propagandist whose duty is to bend all rules about accuracy and come out with half truths or pure lies just to please the boss. Obviously, any journalist who agrees to be manipulated in this manner by a newspaper owner, be he a politician or a business entrepreneur, is subverting one of the most important principles of the profession.

An editor who is reprimanded by the newspaper owner on grounds of inaccuracy cannot claim that the owner is interfering with news processing and coverage. Whenever a newspaper is inaccurate in its news coverage or news processing, complaints always reach the editor, and if the editor had a role in producing the inaccuracy, then it is not long before the complaint reaches the owner of the paper.

From experience on the hot seat in an editorial office, I have first hand knowledge about what happens to a newspaper which publishes inaccurate information. Many were the times when I had to rub shoulders with top lawyers in the corridors of law courts while defending my paper against mistakes by careless reporters or insensitive sub-editors. As one who has seen all these misfortunes befall a newspaper in the event of publication of what is taken by the authorities to be inaccurate information, I would be the last to accuse the management of any newspaper which comes up with a formulae to stem down the rate of inaccuracies.

The management of my paper came up with a splendid scheme which was intended to eliminate factual, typographical and other errors from the newspaper. Sectional and individual areas of responsibility were clearly defined; and those in position of such responsibility were held solely accountable for such errors. Publication of any material as a result of any proven improper motivation, or any form of unprofessional behaviour, meant that someone would be shown the door. An editor or



journalist who falls a victim to such an arrangement will always blame the predicament on undue interference from the management. But the truth of the matter is that any good editor or journalist will accept such an arrangement as a challenge to competence.

## **Impartiality**

*Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expression of opinion. News reports should be free from opinion or bias. This rule does not apply to the so-called special articles unmistakably devoted to advocacy or characterised by a signature authorising the writers own conclusion and interpretation.*

At no time during my time as Managing Editor was an editor forced to write an editorial by the management or proprietor of the newspaper, except on one occasion when an editor resigned citing pressure to do so. The issue became so hot that for the first time in the history of the newspaper, journalists staged a strike in support of their editor. But he let his colleagues down by using very uncivil language against a representative of the proprietor who had come to Kenya from Paris to solve the strike problem.

Since then on, clearly defined rules on editorials demanded that all editorials should be balanced, constructive and informative; they had to demonstrate clearly that they were a result of comprehensive research. Before then, the editor could write about anything he thought about and attack anyone he chose to, the views of the proprietor notwithstanding.

There are many old guard journalists who believe that an editor is reduced to a toothless bulldog by the newspaper proprietor if he is not free to write an editorial of his choice and take a unilateral stand regardless of the views held by other members of staff, the editorial board or even the proprietor. The days when editors could behave like demigods when dealing with anyone who held views contrary to their own seem to have gone, except in situations where newspaper proprietors are totally ignorant about newspaper production and operate entirely at the mercy of the “dictatorial” editors. Such despotic editors turn out to be more ruthless if they become puppets of proprietors.

Modern newspapers that respect professionalism rather than the whims of an individual editor have a team of editorial writers who actually work under an editor of editorials or commentaries. Where there is none, the team works under the managing editor or the editor-in-chief. Normally the team of editorial writers meets every morning to go through possible subjects, then selects the writer of the subject chosen. Such a team will always ensure that the views expressed in editorials are those of the newspaper and not those of an individual editor.

Following the editors resignation fracas, the paper came up with a formula that worked smoothly during my time as the Managing Editor. Whether the same system is used today or whether other papers have a similar method of editorial writing, I am not in a position to know. What I know is that the country is witnessing a new breed of journalism which knows no distinction between news reporting and editorial commentary. Whether the new breed of Kenyan journalism is healthy or not, history will tell.

## **Fair play**

*Newspaper should not publish an unofficial charge affecting reputation or moral character without opportunity given to the accused to be heard: right practice demands the giving of such opportunity in all cases of serious accusations outside a judicial proceeding. A newspaper should not invade private rights or feelings without sure warrant of public right as distinguished from public curiosity. It is the privilege, as it is the duty, of a newspaper to make prompt and complete correction of its own mistakes of fact or opinion, whatever their origin.*



If there is one issue which makes newspaper proprietors shake in their boots, it is the issue of libel cases in which newspapers are found “guilty” of publishing false accusations against respectable members of the society. Apart from losing a lot of money paid as damages and as legal fees, editors who habitually go to court and lose libel cases also lose their professional integrity and credibility.

A number of newspapers in Europe and United States employ full-time services of lawyers as members of the editorial department if only to look at copy likely to land the editors and the owners in court. Editors in those newspapers listen when the lawyers suggest any changes in the presentation of any “dangerous” story. With the new libel laws introduced in Kenya, there are possibilities of similar measures being taken by the owners of newspapers. When that happens, Kenyan journalists in general and editors in particular, should welcome the move to avoid an increasing number of libel cases. Or better still, newspaper managers in Kenya should persuade some of the newly qualified lawyers to train as journalists with a view to using them as anti-libel watchdogs in newspapers.

## **Decency**

*A newspaper cannot escape conviction of insincerity if, while professing high moral purpose, it supplies incentives to base conduct, such as to be found in details of crime and vice, publication of which is not demonstrably for general good. Lacking authority to enforce its canons, the journalism here represented can but express the hope that deliberate pandering to vicious instincts will encounter effective public disapproval or yield to the influence of a preponderant professional condemnation.*

On the issue of morality, editorial management teams of the leading dailies do not seem to need any guidelines from newspaper owners. An Editor of one of the papers for example, is a strong five-time-a-day praying religious man who could be described as a born-again Muslim. Anything obscene or indecent would be published in his paper over his dead body.

Discussing decency in newspapers reminds me of a time when I was on late duty at Nation House during one of Aga Khan’s visits to Kenya. When I was about to put the paper to bed, I received a call from one of the top managers ordering me to remove an “ear piece” advertisement urging readers to use a particular type of condom because it gave the user certain specific results which were described in the Ad in words that left little to imagination. The Ad also had a picture of a tired looking half-naked lady - obviously obscene and indecent stuff for a self-respecting family newspaper.

What was interesting about that Ad was not that it had been approved by senior people in the Advertising Department and placed on the front page of the paper; but the fact that it took the visit by the Aga Khan for anyone to realise that the publication of such material was indecent and uncalled for. The condom Ad incident is just an example of how sensitive people become when owners of newspapers are in town. What happened to the obscene Ad could happen to any one news story considered offensive to the newspaper proprietor when he is on a visit to Kenya.

## **Conclusion**

Until such a day when the Press in Kenya shall freely report on women’s human rights - rights within the family, rights to own property, rights to vote, rights to move about freely without a husband or a male relative’s agreement and the right to pass on citizenship, the Press in Kenya cannot be said to be really free.

Seny Diagne, a Senegalese lawyer says that more than two thirds of Africa’s agricultural commodities are produced by African women, but they only own five per cent of the continent’s wealth. Until the Press in Kenya fights for fair and equal ownership of property and other wealth between women and men in Kenya, it will lose its right to claim to be one of the freest in Africa.

In our society, men’s contribution to household chores has been declining over the years and has become non existent in most homes. Thus, women have become responsible for feeding their families



and the education of their children. Unless the Press in Kenya starts exposing these sad facts, it would lose its legitimacy as a true watchdog for the people.

Time has come when the Press in Kenya should openly start national debates on issues concerning family unwritten laws which see many young women being forced into early marriages, which go hand in hand with early pregnancies and high mortality rates for both children and their mothers (read fellow children). Controversial issues concerning polygamy and dowries should find space on the front pages of our national papers and should be major news items during the peak hour news bulletins for both our radio and TV stations.

Kenya's informal sector is full of women who are the backbone of their families' economic survival yet these women get no support from the national Press whenever they are harassed by the establishment. Very often we see stories written about them as if they were vermin. The Press must protect women's rights in the informal sector. It should help them to not only take responsibilities for themselves but also to be recognised and respected by the rest of the community.

The Western world has started highlighting stories about sexual harassments against women which has earned both the Press and the women the desired respect from the community. Kenya Press should take similar steps to stop sexual harassments against women which are so common everywhere in the country including newspapers, radio and TV newsrooms.

Women's political rights must be respected in this country and their role in politics must go beyond providing songs and dances for entertainments in political meetings. The Press must start discussing important issues such as why we have so few women elected members of Parliament in this country and why even among the few there are still fewer holding top positions in the Government even though many of them are far more educated than some of the men presently holding them.

It is the duty of the press to pose these serious questions for the community to discuss about the mistreatment of women in this country. Why, for example, are there some communities which still fail to recognise women's right to inherit, or have title to land or obtain credit? The Press should start to urge the international donor communities to peg aid conditionalities to women's human rights the same way the Opposition parties are demanding for the recognition other rights. Needless to say, none of these issues will be national subjects for debate in our mass media until women's rights are first recognised in the media houses themselves. The sooner all journalists - both male and female - are treated equally by their own profession, the better it will be for our own national pride.

## **The Present set-up in the Mainstream Print Media**

A research conducted recently shows that there are hardly any women holding positions of responsibility in the three mainstream newspapers, namely *The Daily Nation*, *The East African Standard* and *The Kenya Times*. Looking at Appendix 1, 2 and 3 one gets the shock of realising that there are only three women holding top positions in the three newspapers combined. Even then, the three positions are not strategic key decision-making. All of them work under more powerful male editors.



### Appendix 1: KENYA TIMES (As of April 1997)

No.	POSITION	GENDER
1.	G.M.Ed	M
2.	M.Ed	M
3.	Sup.Ed	M
4.	F.Ed	M
5.	B.Ed	M
6.	S.Ed	M
7.	Sun.Ed	M
8.	C.S.Ed	M
9.	Ed.Ed	M

### Appendix 2: NATION NEWSPAPERS (As of April 1997)

No.	POSITION	GENDER
1.	G.M.Ed	M
2.	M.Ed	M
3.	Sup.Ed	M
4.	F.Ed	F
5.	B.Ed	M
6.	S.Ed	M
7.	Sun.Ed	M
8.	C.S.Ed	M
9.	Ed.Ed	M

### Appendix 3: STANDARD NEWSPAPERS (As of April 1997)

No.	POSITION	GENDER
1.	G.M.Ed	M
2.	M.Ed	M
3.	Sup.Ed	M
4.	F.Ed	F
5.	B.Ed	M
6.	S.Ed	M
7.	Sun.Ed	F
8.	C.S.Ed	M
9.	Ed.Ed	M

**KEY:**

G.M.Ed	GROUP MANAGING EDITOR
M.Ed	MANAGING EDITOR
Sup.Ed	SUPPLEMENTS EDITOR
F.Ed	FEATURES EDITOR
B.Ed	BUSINESS EDITOR
S.Ed	SPORTS EDITOR
Fin.Ed	FINANCE EDITOR
C.S.Ed	CHIEF SUB EDITOR
Ed.Ed	EDUCATION EDITOR
N.Ed	NEWS EDITOR
Sun. Ed	SUNDAY EDITOR





By a senior manager of one of the leading Kenyan media houses

## Summary

The paper examines media coverage with regards to gender issues. The author argues that the print media have been unfairly accused of being gender insensitive. However, it is admitted here that whereas some newspapers have policies which propagate non-discriminatory coverage of women's issues, the reality on the ground may be different. The paper argues that because of the criticism which the media has received regarding their gender insensitivity, the situation is beginning to improve, even at the level of the language used, which is becoming more gender sensitive.

The following is the full text of this paper.



“Looking at the issues reflected in the various topics for discussion, one does detect a serious concern about the conduct of the media with regard to gender issues. The media are, in any case, often criticised for their perceived gender insensitivity and editors are regularly taken to task about the subjects that dominate the columns of their newspapers.

I'm reminded of a comment I heard on the BBC *World Service Broadcast* yesterday regarding the ongoing Euro Cup tournament. It seems that the BBC's female television audience in Britain is unhappy that the sustained coverage has shut out all the programmes women normally identify with. Does this complaint reflect the sort of seriousness that society ascribes to women issues? I think not, but I'll leave that to you to decide.

From where I sit, as the editor of the biggest media house in Kenya, I get a lot of flak, most of it misplaced, regarding our newspapers' alleged insensitivity to gender issues. We seem more concerned, we're told, with coverage of fashion shows, writing features about cosmetics and beauty or the sheer nonsense of pornography. Male prostitutes, we're told, don't receive condemnation as female ones yet the trade is common to both.

I remember receiving a letter about three years ago from a reader who had been positively revolted by what she discerned as a grossly biased article in the *Nation* about a gender issue and without so much as giving me a chance to make good, if the circumstances warranted it, she was quick to dismiss the *Nation* as a male chauvinist paper and declared she'd never read it again.

To my mind, this points to a basic misunderstanding of the way the media operate. I don't think any editor in his right mind deliberately demeans or downgrades women issues. Some media houses do, in fact, have written policy guidelines that propagate the message of non-discriminatory coverage of women issues. At the *Nation* our editorial objectives set out a number of dos and don'ts and one of the don'ts is biases against women not necessarily through conscious disregard of their events, but also through publication of material that would tend to portray them as objects for admiration rather than individuals who contributed immensely to the development of the country.

Despite these caveats, the criticism continues. Women's conferences, we're told, get very little mention, except when they assume the gigantic proportion of the Beijing convention although even then it is said that the only reason the spotlight is so sustained is because the male dominated media regard them more as a circus than a serious forum for discussion.

This sort of criticism is pointedly unfair and conveniently ignores the crusading themes the media take up from time to time. Violence against women, sex discrimination, genital mutilation, marriage and inheritance laws, women in politics and the education of girls are but some of the issues that the media write extensively about. And this is not done in order to fill the columns of our newspapers.

No, the overriding objective is to expose the issues for what they are — social problems that seriously impinge on our country's development. And there's is no likelihood of the media losing their focus on these issues given the growing number of non-governmental organisations specifically looking at the same areas.

The point I'm trying to make is that media content, whether its news, feature articles, editorials or personal columns, is dictated by events, the forces at play in society, its make-up and the overriding needs of its people. Today, for instance, we're more enlightened politically and also about our rights. We also enjoy a larger measure of Press freedom than we did in the eighties. And because of that, even our language is daily becoming more gender sensitive. You must have noticed also that at Government level, some sense seems to be creeping in in terms of recognising women as individuals in their own right.

Having said all these, however, one comes back to the question of gender sensitization of the media and how this can be facilitated. One of the areas I'd suggest you take a serious hard look at is the body of regulations that govern journalists' conduct. When the Code of Journalistic Conduct was drawn up several years, a number of people and lobby groups were invited to deliberate on it. Sadly, very few turned up but I do remember that among those present was the ever active Fatma Anyanzwa of the Anti-rape organisation. Her primary concern was two-fold: media coverage of rape cases and how it could be structured to protect the innocent victims from the harsh public glare, and the media's role in fighting that social evil. Her concerns, I'm happy to say, are actually reflected in the code. Hardly does one ever see the names or pictures of rape victims mentioned in court stories. When that happens, its a gross breach of the standards journalists subscribe.

Considering that the Code is not cast in stone, there might be areas that need to be revised or enriched in order to reflect your present concerns. Media managers would encourage that sort of input as it will have a bearing not just on the conduct of journalists when they are reporting on certain issues but also improve newspaper columns in the areas they have been found wanting.

And that, to my mind, would be a valuable first step in the task of sensitising the media to gender issues. Of course there are those who are so set in their ways that changing them would be an impossible task. But the blame here lies more with society and the values we're establishing than with anything else. I'm thinking, for instance, of publications that are modelling themselves on the gutter Press of the UK in whose columns pictures of naked women translate into enormous figures. That, by the way, is how the *Sun* and the *Mirror* are able to achieve huge circulation figures.

So don't kid yourselves, it's going to be a tough job changing these attitudes and educating society to judge you more fairly.

I hope I've given you a little food for thought and that it helps you in your deliberations”.





By a senior manager of one of the leading Kenyan newspapers

## Summary

The paper defines **news**, as fresh or new information; as those events which add something extra to what we know or informs us about what we don't know. However, **news** is determined by what the audience seems to want. Issues about media ownership and control, editorial decision-making processes, prominence and/or importance attached to news items and the position they should occupy in the print media, are also addressed here.

It is here acknowledged that gender issues do not often appear on the front pages of newspapers. But it is argued that this absence of gender issues on prominent pages of newspapers, does not mean that gender issues are not regarded as news, but rather, such issues fail to qualify as news because of the **ordinariness** of the activities women engage in.

The following is the full text of this paper:

## Introduction

Obviously the organizers of this seminar were being deliberately provocative by setting this as the topic for an editor to grapple with. Behind it is the notion that considerations of what makes news within our or any other context include issues of gender, age, or perhaps race. One hopes that this is not the case because that would be exposing an alarming degree of ignorance which I most certainly do not associate with the group of people assembled here. But just in case it does, even for a few people, the place to start is to attempt to understand what news is.

Neither communication experts nor practising journalists have come up with what can be regarded as the universally acceptable definition of news. Some will say it is that which is unusual, meaning the bizarre, the extraordinary, the unique, etc; others will define news as fresh or new information, that which adds something extra to what we know or informs us of what we don't know; the skeptics will say that news is that which the editor decides is news. The fact is that while none of this is the definite answer to what news is, they all are elements of what eventually is packaged as news.

The best way to proceed then is not to try and outdo the communication experts and media gurus of the past, but to note what these various components of news are. An extremely vital point needs to be made here: that any attempt to define or understand what news is must be beamed against the background of who the audience being addressed by that medium is.

All media have over time - or before they are established as fully fledged communication organs - have or should have a very clear understanding of who they want to address. It is the character of the audiences which give media classifications such as moderate or conservative, up - or down-market, sensationalist or staid, etc. Some media package their information purely for the youth, others aim to capture the top elites while others fish for the middle class.

Treatment of news or what is seen as news will usually be determined by what the audience is seen to want. Another important consideration is who owns the medium and the level of control they exercise over the editorial decision-making.

Having made that point, I can add to the elements already mentioned above, values like the importance of the information being considered for dissemination, its proximity (geographic, emotional, or professional) to the audience, the degree of novelty, etc.

Armed with this, we probably might get away with a working definition of news as: Fresh information which arouses the interest and appeals to the largest number among any targeted audience. Such information may be as earth-shaking as the confirmation of the existence of life in Mars or as ordinary as an update of the weather.



Because of the varied nature of audience types and tastes, newspapers and magazines will generally compartmentalise their offerings under various headings: Local News, Foreign News, Features, Business News and Sports News. Other departments include the Mailbox and the Editorial or Op-Ed Pages.

So far, we have not mentioned gender issues as a special category of news or non-news makers. News revolves around events and it is the event which is judged using the (non-exhaustive) criteria already listed and a decision finally taken on what degree of prominence that event should be given. Prominence, in the newsroom lingo, refers to which page an item should be placed and what position on that page it should occupy.

## **News In Our Local Context**

Although news is treated the same way by media practitioners the world over, the content of news changes radically among societies. Highly developed societies whose concerns have shifted from the basic elements of human survival are unlikely to have news of famines and disease outbreaks occupying prime positions in their print or broadcast media. Similarly, it is unlikely that the latest advance in computer technology will push aside news of a serious famine in the North-Eastern Province from my front page. The computer breakthrough would, of course, be the news in most of the leading media in the developed countries. Just recall the launch earlier this year of the Windows 95 computer software, the latest revolutionary computer package from the US computer giant, Microsoft.

In our local context, one finds that politics (as news, commentary, background pieces etc) forms the bulk of what is offered to audiences as news. Why this is so has been a topic of abiding interest and there is as yet no conclusive explanation why this is so. My thoughts are that Kenya is still a relatively young Third World Country within Africa which is still trying to define and express its own sense of self-destiny, where power relationships between the rulers and the ruled, between communities and between the political players is still unrefined. Add to this the colonial experience and the continued tendency and preference of the independent governments to be dishonest and immodest in their use or abuse of power and one finds legitimate cause for the central position that politics take in defining news within our context.

Often therefore, what one gets as news is what someone in authority said, what one community is pushing forward as an important national issue but which actually is a parochial tribal concern, what the President is saying or reaction to what he said, and since 1992, news of what is going on within and among Opposition political parties. Because of this, commentaries and analyses in the media have taken the cue from what is happening around and have been heavily political. A look at the Sunday papers or the weekly magazines will bear me out.

There is also a lot we read about and hear on accidents, tragedies, disease outbreaks, strikes, farmers woes or glad tidings, problems at universities, a lot of news from the courts, etc. This is the general profile of our news pages.

## **So, When Do Gender Issues Become News?**

It should follow that since women are a central part of this and every other society, gender issues are (or should be) necessarily part of that which is reported. Gender issues in so far as they concern women are reported. Women are leaders, few though they are and they are reported. They are professionals, farmers, criminals, and they are the heroines when societal triumphs are being documented. I dispute the arguments that women or gender issues are treated as second rate news material and hardly ever appear on the prime pages or spots. This is an easy way to find a scapegoat for society's weaknesses and biases.

That gender issues do not everyday appear on the front pages of *The Daily Nation* or *The Standard* is a fact which has nothing or little to do with the biases of editors or reporters but everything to do



with the role society has given the woman and which regrettably, many women have over time been happy to perpetuate wittingly or unwittingly.

Kenya, and this is certainly not limited to this country, is still a patriarchal society where roles and contributions are still distributed and analysed according to gender. From very early, there are certain activities and things which mothers will not allow their daughters to do because, traditionally, those activities are carried out by boys. These biases are seen in the performance of, for example, physically strenuous activities, in the selection of areas of study in schools, in decisions on who should benefit from continued education, etc. The traditional role of the woman as wife and mother has exacerbated that stereotype to the extent that even now, the woman who has been able to shake off the shackles and "make it" in spite of being a woman becomes something of an oddity rather than an example to be emulated.

The absence of gender issues from the front pages of the newspapers is not because women are not active members of society. Far from it, it is because most have been saddled with or are generally involved in activities which, because of their ordinariness, do not fit the definition of news which can sell. If they do, the balance of probability is so much weighed against them, particularly as we go down the scale of prominence. For instance, Mrs. Nyiva Mwendwa will get more prominence if she is issuing a policy statement than if she is politicking in her constituency, although relative to other players in the constituency, she still will get more prominence even if the others are men, as happens to be the case. Now, if this theory is applied across the board, the women lose out badly because the higher you go, the fewer they become.

There is the popular accusation that gender issues become news when women are raped, beaten, treated badly or unfairly, etc. But the fact is that this is rarely reported as straight news (unless it is a crime report) but as a report or court proceedings against the accused, almost always a man. This is news because courts are an unrivalled window into what society is. If, conversely, similar experiences by men are rarely reported, it is not because they do not happen or editors deliberately mask them. It is because society frowns on weak men and they prefer to keep this out of the public domain.

As I said, this is not a uniquely Kenyan phenomenon. The leading newspapers of this world do not treat women or gender issues differently from men and the fact that more women are in the news is purely as a result of more women being involved in events which generate news. Despite this, in terms of quantity, men or men-oriented activities still dominate the news pages of newspapers across the world.

I looked at some publications - local and international - on women just to educate myself a little bit on how these other publications, usually monthlies, treat women and gender issues. I came out with the impression that the local newspapers may actually be doing the women a better service quality than these publications, many of which are managed by women. In summary, I saw a preponderance of news and information on house-keeping, motherhood and mothering sex and how to get the best out of it, man-woman relationships, how men are unfair to women, etc.

Of course there is a lot of information on celebrities and how they live and love. The assumption here is that these are the people presented as role models worthy of emulating. The question is whether this is what is required. Are these the true images of women that we want to broadcast? It would appear to me that this is not the case which is why a deliberate effort has been made by certain organisations to depict the woman for what she is: a pillar of strength in society, the agent of change in many instances and the prime mover of society.

I talk about organisations like the locally-based Interlink Rural Information Service (IRIS), the African Woman and Child Feature Service and the New Delhi-based Women's Feature Service. These are media organisations which have generally or deliberately placed women at the centre of their focus. They generate features which highlight the contribution of women in activities like agricultural development, environmental conservation, women's mobilization, joint efforts to improve the economic, educational and health status of women, etc. This, of course, does not mean that men are not involved in these efforts. It is an acknowledgment of the fact that these efforts have not been

given sufficient attention and recognition both for record and as examples of what has been done and can be done by women.

My newspaper has taken a deliberate step to subscribe to these feature services and use the material extensively in "special feature" sections. We use the material here because there is enough room and we consider it important enough to be treated exhaustively. Often, we highlight these features from the front pages because we think that their not appearing on the front page of the newspaper does not mean that they do not warrant being there.

The deliberate decision to use more of these and not the general run of the mill features which have to do with men-dominated events underscores the concern we have in the newsrooms over the short shrift women and women-related events have been given over time.

Beyond this, media like mine can do little else. It is important that media, contrary to popular opinion, does not set the agenda. It can only accentuate the attention that society applies to an issue. An example, the land grabbing issue which recently has taken on a new life has always been there. However, the media this time decided to give it deliberate attention. Luckily for the media, it was an issue with broad appeal and saleable.

I do not want to downplay the effect of bias and gender insensitivity which may occasionally play a part in the negative depiction of women through, for instance, use and selection of pictures, cartoons, etc. These weaknesses can best be tackled through direct intervention of the kind that the series of workshops you have planned hopes to facilitate.

But ultimately, even a gender sensitive editor must select and present news which can sell. If women, therefore, want more prominence, the challenge is for them to force society to recognise them. This they will do by closing ranks and seeking a bigger role in politics, in economics, in virtually every sphere of society. Society will document this and the media will help highlight and comment positively on this, as indeed it has done in the past. But to expect that media will give more prominence and report favourably on women just because they are women is asking the media to abdicate its role as an objective (as much as possible) mirror on society.





By a senior female journalist in one of the leading Kenya weekly magazines

## Summary

The paper underscores the fact that women occupy an inferior position in the Kenyan society although they constitute 52% of the population. The *status quo* sustained through socio-cultural attitudes has been reinforced by the media. Media use of language is another disappointing aspect which confirms the media gender insensitivity. For example, the use of titles like **housemaid**, instead of for example, **housekeeper**, reference to women as men's property, and hence comparing them to **cars** like **pajero** – is clearly, a demeaning and dehumanising depiction of women. Further still, the language used in some job advertisements tends to encourage stereotyping of job categories and gender inequities in employment. Some advertisements also use photographs of thinly-clad women, with captions bearing sexually suggestive messages like “**toboa ndogo ndogo**” or vehicle advertisements with such words as: “**ride her**”. There are also some radio programmes which use gender insensitive language and messages.

In view of this, there is dire need for change in language use in the media and promotion of gender sensitive reporting, not only in normal news coverage but also in advertising and captions. The paper, however, reminds us that the language problem in the media merely confirms the critical need for gender sensitization of media personnel, both men and women professionals. Media training institutions therefore need to introduce a gender component in their training curriculum. The following is the full text.

## Introduction

### Excerpt 1

“In the English tradition of language, the belief that the male is the norm may be derived in part from the work of John Kirkby, a grammarian in England who, in 1746, formulated his “88 Grammatical Rules”. In Rule 21, Kirkby declared that the male gender was more comprehensive than the female. In making this statement, Kirkby was not only reaffirming the view that men are more important than women but also formalising male as a universal category. This subjective and personal view of language and society was readily adopted by Kirkby's colleagues in the then distinctly male world of grammarians and its effects have resonated for more than two hundred years. Over time, Kirkby's declaration that male is more comprehensive than female led to a number of male-inspired fictions, not least of which is the sleight of speech devised by Geoffrey Leech, a linguist. Leech's categorisations for English into “plus male” and “minus male”, to distinguish masculine from feminine, became a semantic rule whereby ...[minus male] must be the significant feature of girl and woman because females are defined as ‘non male’ since males are the standard comparison for the entire species, and women are the beings who contrast with them...[Thus] the semantic rule which has been responsible for the manifestations of sexism in language can be simply stated: there are two fundamental categories, male and minus male. To be linked to the absence of those qualities, that is, to be decidedly negative and usually sexually debased.”

“Women's resistance to the use of the male - man, men - to define and describe what it is to be human is not mere quibbling. It is one thing to declare confidently that ‘all men are created equal’, but it is starkly clear to women that their equality, having been subsumed in men, is more apparent than

real. Many women also understand that to insist on the male as the norm is to invite the moment when this bias will inevitably collide with reality and create absurdity. Few would credit the assertion that man breast-feeds the young.”

FROM: *Only Silence will protect you. Women, Freedom of Expression and the Language of Human Rights* by Jan Bauer.

NOTE:

I was asked to explain this in more detail, but I feel it is self-explanatory. Minus male, to me, means, like the excerpt says, to be judged only from the point of view of the “all-important” male species, such that the female gender is always an appendage of the male gender, where it is regarded as a nuisance any revision of standard English usage to prevent it from perpetuating reminders of female inferiority.

## **Excerpt 2**

“Of course, the media are not the fundamental cause of the subordinate status of women, nor can it be remedied by the media alone. The causes are deeply rooted in social, economic and political structures, as well as in culturally determined attitudes, and solutions must be found in far-reaching changes. However, it is within the power of the media to stimulate or to retard change to a significant degree.” *From Many Voices, One World*,” 1980:191.

## **Gender and Language in the Kenyan media**

Women in Kenya, despite comprising 52 per cent of the population and playing an active role in the economy, occupy an inferior position. This *status quo* is maintained through cultural and social practices, and the media has played a primary role in maintaining this *status quo*.

Through media images, the subordinate status of women in Kenyan society is reinforced and reinvented. Obviously, this is done through careful choice of words and expressions.

For instance, only recently, a female reader wrote to the *Daily Nation*, complaining about the use of ‘WATCHMAN’ in its popular columns. She said, correctly, that the word was discriminatory because it excluded women. I guess she would have wanted it titled “WATCHPERSON”. Not amused, the *Daily Nation* responded that the word man was universally accepted to be inclusive of women, and that since the column was written by a man anyway, the issue of changing its title did not arise. What the response did not say was what would happen if a female journalist started compiling it, or will this deliberately never happen so as to maintain the *status quo*?

On April 1, Fools Day, the newspapers in this country have made a habit of fooling their readers by publishing some ridiculous but believable tales. This year, *Kenya Times* overdid itself. In one of its jokes, it wrote of a monkey somewhere in western Kenya that made noises and laughed like a woman. In retrospect, meaning that women and monkeys (don’t forget they are animals) communicate the same way. How derogatory!

But then, Kenya’s folktales are replete with similar comparisons, and newspaper reporters and editors are products of their culture and upbringing. Perhaps a deliberate adoption of gender-awareness programmes and local history and cultural diversity programmes targeted at both female and male media professionals at all media training institutions would be of help. It should also be borne in mind that audiences are active and read media products differently depending on their social and cultural locations.



Women are largely portrayed as appendages of males in this society. Hence, sometimes in 1995, when the French ambassador's wife officiated at a certain function, it was as an appendage of her husband. The caption to the picture started "The wife of the French ambassador to Kenya,....." A female editor in a newsroom had a big row with her male counterparts who felt there was nothing wrong with this because the only reason she made the news anyway was because she was the French ambassador's wife. But there is no rule that says one cannot make news in their own right. The event itself was interesting enough and could stand on its own without having to append the main player to someone else. The same female editor had the last laugh when Prince Philip, the husband of Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain made a stopover in Mombasa and the same newspaper failed to mention that he was the husband of Queen Elizabeth. In other words, it was the event and the man that made news. In short, men are news, women are not, unless they are delinquents or appended to a famous man.

Also, remember the case of Winnie and Nelson Mandela's divorce. Winnie was, during the separation, the estranged wife of Nelson, but Nelson was never the estranged husband of Winnie. He remained the respectable, wronged President Nelson Mandela. And poor Camilla Parker Bowles, she is Prince Charles' mistress (a derogatory term by today's standards), but Charles is just plain, respectable Charles.

Here in Kenya, one of the most popular columns published by a widely circulated Sunday newspaper referred to the fictional daughter of the columnist as a Pajero. So popular was the column that many people started referring to their young daughters as Pajeros. The hidden meaning behind this name (which belongs to a luxury Japanese four-wheel drive) is that daughters are property to be disposed of expensively when they mature (or before, in some Kenyan communities. This, therefore, reinforces the customary stereotype that women are nothing but chattel for men to trade in, which has wreaked havoc to many a woman's life; like being denied education because, after all, what is her worth to the family since she will be sold off anyway?

## ADVERTISING

A certain company wanted to advertise some senior positions in a local magazine. Listing the qualifications for the applicants, the advert said: "He should meet the following conditions....."

This reference run throughout the advert. The editor, a woman, rang up the advertiser to find out if only males could apply for the job. Amused, the advertiser responded in the negative. Did they mind then, if the editor changed the wording to include women? More amused, the advertiser gave the go-ahead to the editor to do so.

This may have sounded funny to the advertiser, but it really is not. Through such subtle use of language, the media has effectively side-lined and excluded women from the mainstream life. About 10 years ago, an advert for the Nissan Sahara pick-up just about did it with the use of words to degrade women. On television and the print media, there was a picture of a woman on top of the pick-up, with words describing the woman but referring to the car that were to say the least, obscene. Part of the wording went something to the effect "....ride her...." and other descriptions that left little to the imagination as to the sexual connotations.

The advert was withdrawn after a hue and cry. Ten years later, another similar advert for the Peugeot 405 was withdrawn after a similar hue and cry. How about the "*Toboa Ndogo Ndogo*" advert in reference to miniature packs of alcohol. In common Kenyan parlance, *ndogo ndogo* refers to a young girl, basically a teenager. "Toboa" means burst. It is not uncommon for some old men to be heard to refer to their young girlfriends as "my ndogo ndogo". The wording and the image of a an old man leering at his alcohol minitiare pack (*ndogo, ndogo*), which he is presumably about to burst left little to the imagination. The innuendo was clear; the advert was tantamount to putting a rubberstamp of agreement on sex with minors. The word "toboa" also conjurs the image of violence. In fact, the



Beijing platform for action notes that:

“Gender based violence is inextricably linked to male power, privilege and control. It is important to continue to study and widely publicise the root causes and mechanisms of the different forms of violence, including their relation to the balance of power between men and women in general as well as between individual men and women. Emphasis should be given to understanding the basis of sexual abuse, violence against the girl child, against women migrant workers, sexual harassment and trafficking in women in the context of social, economic and political conditions, including violence committed against women by extremists, including religious extremists. The study should examine the roots of violence in the social-cultural environment, and the impact of mass media, including commercial advertisements, on violence against women.....”

However, this particular advert took time before this advert was withdrawn from the market and graced the pages of several newspapers for a while.

Other wording do not have sexual connotations, but nevertheless stereotype women. For instance, the old Ribena advert which addresses “Akina mama” (mothers), instead of parents generally, reinforces the stereotype that only women need take care of their children, and that men have no role there except in making the children. Or the Omo advert which addresses “ladies”, as if they are the bleach. For instance, it may be argued that the advert is addressed to women, because, naturally, they are the ones who wash, or should wash, clothes.

## NOTE

Take care of the young; or in the case of Omo, wash clothes. However, should we accept this as the natural way of things? Should it not be assumed, especially in this day and age, that men, too, should share in these chores, especially because women have also taken up previously male-dominated chores and are in many cases breadwinners. What is to stop, for example, a man giving a child Ribena, or even helping with the laundry? To concede that only women can carry out these chores is to accept age-old traditions that are increasingly having no place in today’s world. How then, do we train our brothers and sons that things are changing, and to take on “feminine” responsibilities, if we are uncomfortable with changing language that continues to stereotype women?

Listening to the radio programme “Culture Talk” recently, the presenter was on the topic of how people lack manners these days. He told of how nobody, particularly politicians, say sorry when they are wrong any more. “They think it makes them effeminate to say sorry,” he explained. But there are also women politicians, and one would hope they are effeminate. Also, why did the speaker, subconsciously, one would hope, use this word, which refers to the female gender, as if it were derogatory?

Many times, women chairing meetings in this country have been embarrassed by being referred to as chairman. Some go about this problem by substituting chairman with chairperson, chair, or chairlady. However, many others argue that since the word man is universally accepted to mean human beings, then there is no need to fuss. In this case, would such proponents agree that “Man must breastfeed his young,” or “Men carry their young in their wombs for nine months?” I think not. These days, with so many women participating in every sphere of life, it is increasingly obvious that a lot of the older titles were not sex-neutral, and that they are only appropriate for males. New sex-inclusive language must emerge. The *Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing* by Casey Miller and Kate Swift gives some appropriate examples:

- With the signing of the new contracts our manpower needs will double... can read:  
With the signing of the new contracts, our personnel needs will double.
- Although the FDA hasn’t yet formally responded to the petition, agency officials say they don’t have enough manpower to give the noodle issue a high priority, can read:  
...agency officials say they don’t have enough staff to give the noodle issue a high priority...



- The show includes the work of craftsmen from every state... can read:  
The show includes the work of craftspeople (or artisans) from every state... etc.

Miller and Swift give the example of the American Department of Labour's job title changes which now reflect gender neutrality. Some of these are:

#### **Gender Insensitive**

airline steward, stewardess or hostess  
Cameraman, camera girl  
Draftsman  
Fisherman  
Forelady, foreman  
Gateman  
maid  
pressman  
salesman  
watchman

#### **Gender Neutral**

Flight attendant  
Camera operator  
Drafter  
Fisher  
Supervisor  
Gate attendant  
house worker  
press operator  
sales agent  
guard

These examples also fit into the local situation. Which brings us to the stereotyping of the male gender into certain positions in society. Dustbinman and doorman spread the idea that only men are appropriate for these lowly paying jobs. And every time crime is reported, newspapers report that ...a gunman or highwayman committed the crime, even when nobody knows the gender of the criminal. Why don't reporters use the words robber or intruder and rubbish collector, etc?

For example;

### **POLICE IN MANHUNT FOR WOMAN IN SH19.5 MILLION CASE**

"Police in Mombasa have launched a manhunt for a woman in connection with the theft of tea worth Sh19.5 million from a godown..." *Kenya Times* October 25, 1996.

Could read:

### **POLICE HUNT FOR WOMAN ....**

Police in Mombasa are hunting for a woman in.....

National Bank's and for the Vision Account:

"Our children are the vision. They are the future. If you open a National Bank Vision Account for your child, you will be starting him on the long road to achievement.

Don't girls have a future too?

The ad could have been re-written:

"Our children are the vision. They are the future. If you open a National Bank Vision Account for your children, you will be starting them on the long road to achievement. Or

....If you open a National Bank Vision Account for your child, you will be starting him or her on the long road to achievement.

Here, critics may argue that gender-inclusive editing of text - and minds - is often a "pain" and its results often a "mess", which is true but largely irrelevant. Like Jaes Gaffney, writing in the magazine *America* says, the moral aberrations of culture have never been corrected without pain and mess.

- Headline in *The East African Standard*:

## **Businessmen Jostle for Space**

The scale of commercial activities at Golf Course Estate has reached an astonishing proportion ...

### **NOTE:**

That many businesses around Golf Course area, particularly in Kenyatta Market, are run by women. It is only fair that their role be recognised.

Headline could have read:

Traders Jostle for Space

OR

Businesses Jostle for Space

**Mankind's oldest sin** (Headline in the **Daily Nation**):

Therapists say adultery among working *women* is on the increase.... (so went on the story under the headline).

### **NOTE:**

A story about adultery among women sounds funny with a headline talking about mankind's oldest sin....

It could have been written as follows:

**Human Beings' Oldest Sin or The Oldest Sin**

Therapists say adultery among.....

**30-man gang terrorises nuns, priests:**

Priests and nuns deserted a Catholic diocesan residence in Kiambu after a 30-man gang raided the premises and killed a guard....

### **NOTE:**

When there is such a large number of gangsters, it is wrong to assume all of them are of the male gender, since it is usually impossible to see all of them, particularly in the dark. Sometimes, gangsters are also hooded. There have been increasing reports of women involved in crime. A headline like the one above perpetuates the negative image that only men steal or are gangsters.

The headline and story would have been better written:

**Gang of 30 terrorises nuns, priests**

Priests and nuns deserted a Catholic diocesan residence in Kiambu after a gang of 30 raided the premises and killed a guard... etc, etc...





By an experienced female journalist with long media experience

## Summary

The paper argues and recognises the need to promote women's image in the media. The paper notes that there is gender bias in the media. It notes in particular that there is a close relationship between negative images of women in the print media and popular literature (like textbooks and novels) which influence societal attitudes towards women. These negative images of women by the media also constrain women's efforts in taking up rightful places in national development. As a result, women continue to suffer the worst effects of underdevelopment, oppression and poverty, with the majority of them forming the largest group of the rural poor and urban slum dwellers.

The paper examines the use of graphics and cartoons in Kenya's print media to indicate their gender insensitivity. The cartoons in particular show women as gossips, weaklings and incapable of independent action in decision-making. Similarly, cartoons have portrayed women simply as housewives, men's property, and as sexual objects. Women are also portrayed as beasts of burden in novels and other literary works. The paper suggests the need to gender sensitize authors of such publications, as one way of contributing to the advancement of the status of women in society.

The paper further suggests that more women who are gender sensitive should be involved in the strategic decision-making levels of the media, and communication work, with a view to changing the negative portrayal and images about women in the media.

The following is the full text of this paper:

## Introduction

When the Women and Media Project was set up in 1994, one of its main objectives was to challenge the negative images of Kenyan women in the media. The aim was to evolve a media policy that would guide not only the basics of the journalistic process – gathering, processing and disseminating information – but essentially one that promotes women's image in the media.

The project arose from a deeply-felt need to redress the differential treatment of Kenyan women and men in the media. IRIS felt the need to explore the effectiveness of various media in disseminating gender-sensitive information for a specific target group and audience. While recognising the existence of various communication media such as print (newspapers, magazines, newsletters and posters) and electronic (radio, television, video and cinema), we were concerned with exploring how these media could popularly participate in promoting the women's agenda.

From the start, IRIS believed that negative images of women in the media including popular literature (novels and textbooks) could create an equally negative attitude among school children towards women – an attitude that is bound to linger on into adulthood. There was a feeling that authors of such publications, their editors and publishers needed to be gender-sensitised if their publications were to serve the long-term aim of achieving the autonomy of women, so that they are in control of their destiny in terms of the economics, the politics, the socio-cultural and physical factors that their lives revolve around.

There was recognition that Kenyan women were constrained in their efforts to take their rightful place in national development by negative images in the media – images that demean their lives and capabilities or completely ignore their contribution to society. The negative image of women in the



media was viewed to be a reflection of their poor representation in the top echelons of power. What was evident was that women were short-changed in virtually all the sectors that matter but especially in the political and economic arena. All in all, women were found to suffer the worst effects of underdevelopment in the rural areas and form the majority of the population in urban slums.

In spite of this situation, the local media were deemed to have failed to use their power as agents of social change to speak on the status of women. At best, the public is treated to sporadic instances of goodwill towards women when something as awfully horrendous as the gouging out of the eyes of Piah Njoki occurs. The dominant image of women in the media is one of a trivialised section of society – an image that distorts the harsh reality that is women's lives.

## **Images of Women in the Media**

Exploitation of women in advertising stereotypes that depict them as sex objects and consumers is a topic that has preoccupied people interested in gender equality for a long time. Studies that have been carried out on sex-role stereotyping show that the media encourage their audience to accept such stereotyping. Frueh and McGhee(1975) found that children who spent 25 hours or more in a week watching TV acquired typical stereotype characteristics as opposed to those who did not.

Both print and electronic media in Kenya – like elsewhere around the world – continue to treat men and women as if they belong to two distinct worlds. Men and women are not portrayed as normal human beings. They are instead assigned stereotyped roles which form part of the societal norm system. Thus, men are portrayed as self-confident, successful, competent and tough, among other “masculine” attributes. Women on the other hand are portrayed as insecure, emotional, naïve, dependent on men, ignorant, helpless, but also beautiful, affectionate and gentle.

In the advertising world, the woman is portrayed as a housewife - cum - mother or as an attractive young woman.

## **Graphics and Cartoons**

For this workshop, I thought we should take a closer look at the popular cartoons in the Kenya's print media to determine their gender-sensitivity and to propose acceptable alternatives. Owing to the limited notice availed to me to prepare this presentation within the context of other on-going activities, what follows is by no means a rigid analysis of the visual presentation of women in the media. I want to look at it as a sketchy situation analysis which can form the basis of a more thorough analysis along the lines of accepted research methodologies.

The analysis examines cartoons and cartoon strips in *The Daily Nation*, *The Sunday Nation*, *The East African Standard* and its Sunday edition, *Kenya Times* and its Sunday edition. The Nation Group's *Taifa Leo* and *The People* newspaper are also discussed. The analysis is random with no specific order on the period over which the cartoons appeared and no specific pattern with regard to the number of cartoons appeared and no specific pattern with regard to the number of cartoons analysed from the above-mentioned publications. The purpose of the analysis is to reinforce the view that in spite of the ink that has gone into exposing the problem of negative portrays of women in the media, the situation remains unsatisfactory with no reversal of the trend in sight. As I go through them, I will pass the offending cartoons around. Please pass them on as you listen. If you find this disruptive, you may look at them later although I think the presentation will have more impact if you can see what it is based on.

## **Women as gossips**

Portrayal of women as gossips is a favourite of cartoonists. *The Kenya Times* cartoonist, (Nanjero '96) captures this image in cartoon number 1. The impression created is that gossiping is a preserve. I leave you to judge whether this is indeed so.



## **Women as Weaklings**

To perpetuate the image that women are weak and will not ward off male aggression, the saying: 'Husband beats wife, wife beats child, child beats dog, and dog bites cat' has gained wide currency. The implication is that if women fought back, the vicious chain reaction would be broken. Portrayal of a woman that fights back would of course distort the norm, which is to depict women not only as weaklings, but also as people who are incapable of confronting situations in their lives, thereby letting out steam on weaker people down the line. Stano in *People's Digest* gives a vivid portrayal of this.

## **Women as tea-makers**

Tea-maker is of course a representation of all the demeaning jobs that women hold. *The East African Standard* carried a beautiful cartoon pillorying Professor Saitoti's recent incredible announcement that Kenya's economy had generated 503,000 new jobs. While the claim was laughable, it is sad to note that it is a woman placing the cutting edge on the joke by completing Saitoti's joke on the new jobs "... each paying a 1,000 bob salary." Context aside, the fact that it is women who make tea in offices is not lost to the reader. In fact, a visit to most government offices will show that there are as many female tea-makers as there are women. But even if there were more women tea-makers, portraying them in the media as such, only goes to reinforce the negative image of women, with the result that the younger generation gets to believe that women are the tea-makers while men are the policy-makers.

In the same cartoon, the one woman sitting at the table with Prof. Saitoti is playing a possible role, only staring at the VP. Journalists are portrayed as men – both the one taking notes with a recorder in front of Saitoti and the one carrying a video camera.

The myth that journalism is a man's job has of course greatly worked to the detriment of women, who have repeatedly been left behind when opportunities to promote them have been given to men, often side-stepping competent women in the system.

## **Women as men's property, slaves, sex objects**

Much has been said about Bogi Benda's sexist cartoons. In the *East African Standard* of May 25, 1996, Bogi's friend asks him how much a dentist would charge to remove one's teeth. The reply? "Do you need a dentist to remove your teeth? Just let me catch you talking to my girl and I'll remove all of them!" Three days later, Bogi comes with another. Sofi (for that is the name of Bogi's wife) is told by a friend of a man in the estate who can hypnotise people to do what he want. When Sofi asks what "hypnotise" means, — "to get someone in your power and make her do what you want" — Sofi's cryptic remark is that that is not to hypnotise. "That is marriage." Again the idea that marriage is a place where a woman is totally subject to the man is portrayed. Is this the image we want the younger generation to have of marriage? A place where man and woman are not equal partners but where a woman is totally subject to the man's will? Think about it.

Still on Bogi, a day earlier, the stereotype of the servant-wife is portrayed. Bogi sits comfortably as Sofi serves him. The sexist interpretation of Bogi's June 14 joke is not lost to the reader judging from the mischievous smile on his face. While a straight forward interpretation of George's girl friend would be that he has not yet disclosed his ultimate intentions to Bogi's (is it secretary), Bogi's smile says it all. We all know what goes on in the dark.

*Taifa Jumapili's* Juha Kalulu is no different from Bogi Benda. Woman is portrayed as man's servant. Part of her role is to ferry the drunken husband home. He should not be left alone to sober down and in the process perhaps come to recognise alcohol's dehumanising influence on the drinker. No, he must be carried home to manufacture stories of how he made it back home.



## Women as beasts of burden

Early in the 60s, Okot p'Bitek (God rest his soul) described the African woman as a beast of burden. Thirty years on, the image lingers. In *Taifa Leo* of June 5, 1996, Nation's celebrated cartoonist Gado captures the 1997 election mood in Kisumu where voters are giving Raila Odinga their votes for reviving (we hope!) the molasses factory. Now we all know that while fishing is the mainstay of Nyanza and men as well as women are engaged as fish-mongers, the cartoonist finds it necessary to have the woman rather than the man carry the fish basket. Why not have them all carrying the baskets?

Or why not exclude the baskets? After all, will they line up at the polls with their fishing baskets? And so on.

## Recommendations

The negative portrayal of women in the media is not a concern of Kenya alone. It stems from the low status of women in the media. Because women at the decision-making levels in the media are so few, they lack the clout to push changes aimed at achieving a more positive portrayal of women in the media.

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) which was held in Beijing, China, last September, recognised the tremendous advances in information technology that had seen the evolution of global communications networks transcending national boundaries. The impact of the technology on public policy, private attitudes and behaviour, especially of children and adults, was equally recognised. It was recognised that the media had the potential to make much greater contribution to the advancement of women than was currently happening.

But that was as far as the good news went, for while the Beijing Platform for Action acknowledged the involvement of more women in the communications sector today more than ever before, few women had attained positions at the decision-making level. Few women served on governing boards and bodies that influenced media policy.

Death of women in decision-making positions is largely responsible for the perpetuation of negative and degrading images of women in media communications – electronic, print, visual and audio. The Platform accuses the print and electronic media in most countries of not providing a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. Media are further accused of producing material that are pornographic, violent and degrading to women.

To redress the imbalances of the existing situation, Strategic objective J.1. of the Beijing Platform of Action seeks to:

- Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.

The Platform urges Governments to support women's education, training and employment to promote and ensure women's equal access to all areas and levels of the media (Paragraph 239 (a)). Governments are further urged to "Promote women's full participation in the media, including management, programming, education, training and research." They are also urged to "Aim at gender balance in the appointment of women and men to all advisory, management, regulatory or monitoring bodies, including those connected to the private and state or public media."

One of the latest and most comprehensive publications addressing the employment status of women in the media is Margaret Gallagher's *An Unfinished Story: Gender Patterns In Media Employment*. The 120-page UNESCO publication addresses a broad range of issues from the vulnerability of women in the media, their training, their employment and the division of labour in various media as well as obstacles to their employment in the media. The study notes discrepancies between training and employment opportunities. Today, large numbers of women, in many cases over 50 per cent of trainees, are studying mass communications and journalism. In the UN's own



Ironically, the tremendous growth in the pool of trained media women has not been matched in the employment sector. In no country do women hold 50 per cent of media jobs, be it in radio and television or in the print media. Outside Europe, the percentage is less than 30. Of the 43 countries covered in Gallagher's study, which encompasses 239 organisations, women reach 50 per cent of the workforce in only two cases – Estonia and Lithuania – both out in Eastern Europe. Of the 10 Southern Africa countries in Gallagher's sample, women's share of jobs reaches more than 40 per cent in both Botswana and Lesotho and drops to less than 20 per cent in Malawi and Mozambique. Shima Moslem, quoted by Gallagher, points out that 'educational qualification is often not the main criterion for joining a profession'.

- It seems that men are more likely than women to enter the media through other doors than those opened by education and training. Indeed studies in many countries have shown that male media professionals tend to be less well qualified in education terms than their female counterparts.

Among equally qualified graduates, women are less likely than men to find employment in the media. A 1983 survey in the United States found that while 14.6 per cent of all graduates found jobs in news-editorial areas, only 11.8 per cent of female graduates did so. A more recent study in The Netherlands found that 94 per cent of males graduating at the Utrecht School of Journalism found jobs as compared to only 65 per cent of the women. It would seem that in many instances, women are discriminated against at the stage of recruitment, simply because they are women.

## **Training Institutions**

Discrimination against women in the media starts right at the training institutions, where women are a minority. In Nigeria in 1988, across 10 universities and polytechnics, only 6.5 per cent of teaching staff in departments of communication were female. The low representation of women in the media means that media training is not gender-neutral. Stella Chinyere Okunna, describing the Nigerian situation, found that mass communication courses not only failed to consider issues such as gender portrayal in the media, but that course assignments themselves stereotyped journalism students into traditional gender roles.

- Exercises and role plays in which the "editorial team" is composed of females with responsibility for "soft" news and features, and males who are the "hard" news reporters and editors, give aspirant journalists a clear message about what they can expect in real newsrooms.

Low representation of women in media institutions is not unique to Africa. A German study found that in the winter semester of 1994/95, only one per cent of the lectures dealt with gender-related issues, and not only that: all the lectures were given by female staff.

## **Women's employment in the media**

Is the female audience of information media – audio, visual and print – satisfied with the way the media depict their lives? Although Gallagher acknowledges this to be a badly under-researched area, the few studies that have been done are unanimous that women believe they are badly served by the media. They feel that if there were more women journalists and female experts voicing their opinions in the media, these could "act as significant role models for other women, stimulate female interest in public issues, and – perhaps – sometimes speak in the interests of all the women."

While an individual's power within the media is limited by a wide range of regulatory, financial and professional controls, media content is produced by individuals who, despite limitations, have some scope to influence what is seen, heard and read by millions. It is important that women are in a position to shape those media messages. While on this it's important to note that more of the regular cartoonists are women. I wonder why. But will women cartoonists make a difference in the portrayal of women in the media? I want to think so.



# **S BRACING FOR GENDER SENSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE**

## **Summary**

By a freelance male journalist in several sections of the Kenyan print media.

This section focuses on Gender Issues in **news gathering and news processing**, and the role of women in media. The paper discusses the crucial role played by the media in the dissemination of information, and its portrayal of women's struggle for development and autonomy out of their traditional roles, which are inherently limiting. The paper argues that the reporter is on the giving end while the consumer is on the receiving end. And yet, journalists colour news coverage with their perceptions and values. This is evident in their coverage and portrayal of women in the media including gender related language use, photographs and captions. In this section, therefore, the negative portrayal of women in news coverage is highlighted and undercoverage of gender related events in news gathering is decried. In this regard, the paper stresses the importance of improving on coverage of gender news in the media, and employing media women in prominent positions in the administration of information and decision-making. In view of this, the recommendation is made for gender-training and sensitization of media personnel at all levels.

The following is the full text .

## **Introduction**

In recent years and particularly since gender activists begun crusading for an equitable assessment of gender issues, the Kenyan media has been under sustained scrutiny in its treatment and handling of gender issues.

Concern and attention has tended to focus on the effect and influence of news gathering, presentation and processing of gender issues and the overall perception and reception by news consumers. This is an acknowledgment of the fact that the media is the foremost pacesetter of both opinion and attitudes in society.

One could well say with a fair measure and sense of certainty that the spotlight has far and large reflected on the attitudes which the media tends to create in the minds of news consumers; attitudes which can be negative and destructive and therefore counter-productive to the overall gender question. Inevitably, this concern has given rise to the question of what remedial measures can be taken by the media in the gathering, processing and presentation of gender news to achieve gender sensitive coverage.

Closely tied to this has been the question of how best can promote and sustain gender sensitivity among the key players in the media taking cognizance of the fact the media wields the single-most important influence as a social disseminator, as a result of which the public largely depends on it for information and education on issues, of which, the gender question is one salient concern.

A further issue which has been canvassed has been that reflecting on the role which women media practitioners should play in ensuring a more positive orientation in media coverage in acknowledgment of the fact that the women's struggle for self-development and autonomy is linked to the freedom to express themselves and this necessitates the need to have more control and access to means of communication.

Problems facing women media practitioners in Kenya have long been identified as including, but certainly not limited to, ill representation, constrained opportunities for upward mobility and stereotyping.

The foregoing is a clear testimony of the role assigned to the media which emphasizes the need to take full cognizance of the important role of the media as an educator. It must in particular be appreciated



that the media has a major role to play in the advancement of women through a proper dissemination of gender issues.

It is this which will help to enlighten news consumers about the need to embrace redeeming attitudes towards women, long stereotyped as a lesser being, to enable them realize their potential to the full and be able to rise up against cultural chauvinism.

But to be able to do so, the media must be well-suited for, and be equal to the task to ensure that it portrays the gender question in its positive and redeeming perspective.

In focusing on the need to ensure gender sensitive coverage, it is pertinent for the media to understand that gender is a set of cultural roles appropriate to the sexes at a given time. But gender is not sex which refers to one's physical biological forms. Although there is a correlation between female sex/feminine gender and male sex/masculine and gender, it is the social and cultural perceptions of masculine-feminine traits and roles that determine gender.

The role of the media in influencing perceptions of gender is based on the central role it plays by influencing the process of socialization and culture. While both male and female are socialized to fit within assigned gender roles, the media has the role of educating the public about the shortcomings in media.

It can influence change by the portrayal it assigns to both men and women in relation to each other. The manner of conceptualization and handling of the gender issue is essence, the ultimate measure of gender sensitivity by the media.

## **News Gathering**

News gathering is a selective process through which the media seeks out news with a view to disseminating it to news consumers. The process is distinguished by the fact that the reader is a passive participant in the process while the news reporter or correspondent is the active party. While there are certainly other players with a measure of influence over what is published, it is the individual reporter or correspondent reaching out to the news source who initially influences what is published by the respective news medium.

As a process, news gathering is the most basic and fundamental issue in the media work because it is the starting point which sets the ball rolling in what is eventually sifted out of a news report. On its own, news gathering does not ordinarily call for any specified or specialised skills over and above journalist training and a basic understanding of the newsroom practice and the specific media house rules.

But in specialized areas of news coverage, this may not suffice and indeed, the peculiar needs of such areas of news gathering may underscore some specific needs which must be matched and complimented by attitudes and perceptions which help project news values with a worth premium. One such area is gender coverage.

In gathering news on gender issues, a news correspondent or reporter exerts an indeterminate influence over what is eventually submitted to the newsroom because he or she is able to source through the information at hand and make a decision over what aspects to highlight and which ones to downplay.

The decision is certainly a value judgement influenced by one's attitudinal inclinations on gender issues which in turn measures the extent of gender sensitivity.

A reporter's perception of news value therefore has a strong bearing on gender coverage. Even then, however, the in-house policy of specific media houses has a correspondent and often, strong influence, in determining how a correspondent or reporter will go about gathering news.

The correspondent is naturally influenced by what fits within the news policy of the specific media houses, corporate policies and in-house inclinations.

Unlike the fledgling rural press whose news coverage is predicated upon homegrown predisposition of its peculiar region and audience, the mainstream media in Kenya has its news predicated upon



western values which has been a drawback on coverage of gender issues largely because , conflict and controversy tend to exert an influence on news content.

As a result, one finds that in the processing of news on gender, women hardly feature in the front pages or positions of prominence except when it is over something negative such as scandals, while the little coverage often leaves predominantly distorted images, making it difficult for a woman to find her rightful place and role in society as seen through the eyes of the media.

The problem essentially lies with the failure to bestow a news premium on soft news which is often viewed as too “ordinary” and therefore consigned to news-filler pages, because such issues are perceived as lacking in depth to command any wide appeal within the national constituency.

There is need for Kenya’s mainstream media to acknowledge our peculiar position as a developing country in which, these “ordinary” events set the pace for a fair segment of the rural population who account for 65 per cent of the population and whose lives they touch and affect in a most special way.

It has already been said that by failing to breath life into news activities generated by this substantial portion of Kenya’s population, the mainstream media could find itself suffering from a credibility crisis and losing out on its relevance with a sizable percentage of Kenya’s population.

The need to reach out to this segment of the population can be readily appreciated by considering that the rural population offers the widest scope for media growth and development. Currently, the primarily urban daily readership figures of newspapers conservatively indicate that the dailies are roughly read by a readership about the population size of Nakuru at 320,000 sales accounted by **Daily Nation** (190,000); **The East African Standard** 50,000; **Kenya Times** 20,000 and **Taifa Leo** 60,000.

What needs to be done, therefore, is to take conscious measures in news gathering and move away from this traditional perception of news and acknowledge development issues as being capable of generating news. This is one of the ways of pushing the gender agenda in terms of a news gathering process.

## **Presentation**

Presentation of women in the media has a strong bearing on the manner in which readers perceive the gender agenda.

Presentation influences the level and degree of importance attached by news consumers on issues under coverage by the media. This means that the mode of presentation can have a redeeming and beneficial influence if it is objective or in the alternative, it can have the effect of cheapening and reducing the importance of the specific subject of media coverage.

Presentation is an all-encompassing issue touching on the placing of a news story, the placing of pictures in relation to the message conveyed by the visual image and the captions and headings assigned to the picture and story respectively.

At all times , a picture must identify with the salient issues which may not be obvious because of its context but which are, nevertheless, issues in need of projection to create a conscious and re-awakening mind of the reader.

To give an illustrative example, a photograph showing a woman carrying a child strapped on her back, some baggage on the head and left hand, while the man accompanying her walks relatively free, needs an appropriate caption which helps provoke the reader to see the gender inequity in such an arrangement . To fail to do so and merely assign a caption about travellers streaming back to town from holidays is to totally blank out the import of the moment.

Stereotyping of gender issues is not merely a problem which occasionally bedevils newspapers. Magazines are equal culprits facing a similar shortcoming.

By way of illustration, one may take a close look at women magazines which enjoy 60 per cent of the country’s total magazine readership outside the mainstream media, but which consciously help project stereotyped images of women by confining their coverage largely to women’s traditional roles, such as knitting, cookery etc. Furthermore, in the cropping of pictures showing family cover



models, the woman is normally, if not invariably, the one who on most occasions, holds out the child in a family photograph which only serves to reinforce the traditional role of women as child minders. The greatest problem this presents is that it fails to support a liberating understanding of the family system and values by marrying paternal and maternal roles as complimentary and not isolated concerns.

When one considers that these magazines enjoy a vast and enviable readership which stands at 60 per cent of total magazine readership in Kenya (compared to 30 per cent for political magazines and 10 per cent for business magazines), one appreciates the extent to which this presentation can influence perception of gender issues in a xenophobic way.

The sum total of it is that this presentation creates a problem of trivializing gender issues in the media and effectively denies the media an opportunity to identify with the needs of women in relation to men, and thus help create an environment in which women issues can become societal and developmental issues and hence a rallying focus for policy debate.

But even where the media has gone out of its way to help redeem the image of women in news coverage, it has in most cases ended up being bogged down by technical issues of format and space that should be allocated to gender issues at any one time.

It is for this reason that the existence of women pages in the print media or women desks in the electronic media have not helped matters much, largely because the existence of these pages and desks tend to correspondingly restrict and narrow the scope of gender issues' coverage which reduces the idea behind them to mere tokenism.

For example, Uganda Television devotes 30 minutes to the women's desk out of the 42 hours per week it broadcasts. For radio, it is 1 hour and 30 minutes for the women's desk out of the 126 hours per week.

The Kenyan situation can also be effectively corrected if there exists a strong women's lobby group as shown by the example of the Malagasy Female Journalist Organization (AFJM) which has influenced the **Radio Nationale Malagasy** so that, coverage of women issues comes third after politics and economics.

To complement the work of women desks, there is need to look into ways of establishing an exclusive women's news and features agency. Such an initiative would help ensure a sustained and steady flow of relevant news coverage of women's issues. In addition, it would help create a broad consciousness within media houses on the need for sensitized and broader coverage of gender issues.

## **Processing**

News processing is done by the editors and sub-editors whose work is to edit and place stories in appropriate pages which equally involves deciding on the space to be taken up by the respective news story.

This is a most critical duty because the editors and sub-editors are left to shape stories written by correspondents and reporters without the benefit and advantage of having been at the source of news.

Through the processing of a news item, the prejudices of editors and sub-editors is tested in their content and character of the final product that eventually reaches news consumer.

Sub-editors and editors certainly need to be gender sensitive, which is the only way by which they can make a conscious and deliberate effort towards ensuring that, ultimately, only gender sensitive news products make their way out of the production line, including the allocation of photo captions and selection of headlines for stories. These functions are all the prerogative of editors and sub-editors.

This duty is, however, not always discharged with equal and corresponding sensitivity. If one was to sample through a few examples from the mainstream media reflected in blunt headlines like



**Mombasa Woman Draws Out Crowd's Vengeance**, ( instead of **Crowd Vents out Its Vengeance**, which conveys the message without stigmatizing the victim). Another recent headline: **Woman Killed, 4 Injured by Terror Gang**, could have read better as **4 Injured by Terror Gang in Fatal Raid** as one way of protecting the woman victim.

Such slanted and veiled headlines serve to nurture an image of dependence and vulnerability by protecting women in a position of disadvantage and therefore vulnerable, weak and in need of protection. Furthermore, such newspaper coverage creates the impression that women who hit the headlines are normally those who steal, murder, peddle drugs or brew illicit beer.

An overview of the situation in Kenya reveals that women are often portrayed as victims; passive onlookers, criminals or dependents - a situation that enhances gendered stereotype and reinforces the traditional negative perspective of women.

A study on the portrayal of women in popular humour columns such as *Whispers* including cartoon strips such as *Eb and Flo*, *Bongoman* and *Bogi Benda* has shown that over 52 per cent of the columns depicted women negatively as socially and economically dependent on men and whose status are often limited and narrowed down to that of wives, mothers or mistresses.

This situation can only be corrected if the processing of news by sub-editors and editors are more gender-conscious in their choice of language. In giving captions, for instance, either to photographs or cartoon strips, certain usage of language helps project gender insensitivity by classifying and distinguishing men from women in a way that projects and nurtures gender stereotypes. One recent caption to a newspaper illustration for instance noted: "*Most men when drunk think about getting rich while women idle their time gossiping about the latest hairstyles*".

The current state of affairs in the media with regard to gender presentation can be corrected through several measures.

One such measure must certainly be to undertake corrective steps which seek to enhance the participation of women media practitioners by laying emphasis on vertical mobility in terms of decision-making as a way of enhancing the room available for women to influence and determine the pace and scope of media gender coverage.

Even then, it must be emphasized that there is a glaring need for guidelines on gender issues in media houses because having more women journalists and media managers will not necessarily enable women to effectively push the gender agenda **case** if levels of gender sensitization remain low among media actors across the board and where deliberate guidelines to promote gender sensitive policies are not in place.

Such guidelines will secure for the media the ability to tap sensitive coverage which would call upon the media to go beyond the events that create news and break these down into how and to what extent they affect specific groups of people. Rarely does the media take this angle by going beyond the headlines to capture the human angle where women are often the victims of misery and tragedy.

For instance, civil strife has tended to focus on the protagonists prosecuting war even though, there is an equal, if not greater need, to bring out the true cost of such tragedies on women. In most cases, armed conflict destroys everything that women as a social category have worked hard to build.

For instance, during the ethnic cleansing warfare in Kenya, women were targeted for sexual violence (rape), as homemakers and economic managers when their houses and granaries were burned down. These issues were hardly addressed in media reports and indeed rarely does media intervention in conflict situations single out the specific gender implications of war and other forms of societal violence. And yet there is a gnawing need for media interventions in this conflict sector.

The importance of a gender sensitive approach to conflict coverage and certainly in all other situations of media work is that, it would provide a better perspective of the victims, reality and consequently better ways of responding to the needs of both women and men in ways that promote the common good.

But the need for an enhanced numerical media presence of women remains a begging consideration, as emphasized by the *International Women's Tribune Centre*, which underlined the



need for greater representation of women in the media after its findings revealed that on average, the women workforce in the media rarely exceeds 30 per cent worldwide. Africa, according to the survey, had only 20% women present in media houses.

The same study notes that the situation is even worse at managerial levels where women only hold only 10 per cent of the jobs worldwide but even fewer in Africa.

What do these figures translate into? By being poorly represented in decision-making women media practitioners are denied a scope of influencing an agenda that is gender sensitive and one which can fit gender concerns to policy debate level.

It is not a truism that women can be their own best guardians. It has been proven that women media managers are more receptive and sensitized towards gender issues and indeed, wherever they have had half a chance, they have made a name for themselves. But regrettably, few get even half a chance.

Even then, the fact cannot be denied that even where women do not occupy plum media positions, their fair representation in terms of numbers is capable of having benevolent influence in the coverage of gender issues, including how they fare under the tribal and feudal systems.

At least this is a lesson to be learned from Pakistan's mainstream media where the increase in women journalists has led to greater mainstream coverage of women issues, including how they fare under the tribal and feudal systems.

Women have not only managed to ensure more coverage of gender issues but also have equally influenced attitudes on issues that stigmatize them which shows that they, can positively influence perception of gender issues where they have a strong editorial input.

Issues such as rape are therefore treated not just as sensational stories but set in their true context in which women are often regarded as property and sometimes raped to avenge male honour.

Granted that media managers exert the single-most important influence in media coverage, both in terms of what is published and how it is published, then there is a case for positive discrimination in terms of encouraging a more representative proportion of women media managers.

This situation can be appreciated if one considers a recent study which reviewed the way the Kenyan media portrays women. The findings of this study titled *The Portrayal of Women in the Kenyan Print Media* observed that women "receive about 10 per cent of representation in media coverage despite the fact that they comprise 52 per cent of Kenya's population".

The study made interesting findings in terms of gender proportions between male and female media practitioners: "By 1990, the percentage of male by-lines in the Kenyan media had risen to 60 per cent while that of females was zero".

At the moment, Kenya does not have a woman provincial information officer and out of 52 district information officers, only six are women.

On its part, the *Presidential Press Service* only has 2 women on board out of its total staffing which stands at 90. Not even in the *Foreign Correspondents Association of East Africa*, is the picture any merrier granted that there are only 25 women out of a total membership of 236.

The issue which needs to be faced boldly is one of whether women should clamor ascending up the ladder and be content with the mere fact of rising up the hierarchy. There are pertinent issues which must be focused on in seeking greater vertical mobility for women in the media and the experience of the Pakistani women is clearly instructive.

It cannot be gainsaid that it has taken courage for women media practitioners to step out of culturally assigned roles as followers and not initiators to bring about the much needed change.

Women journalists in Pakistan have not only made a mark, but a difference. But in the same and equal breath, they've tasted the bitterness of success. The last two decades have seen a flurry of women who have scaled the professional ladder, some to the very top, working for English language publications.

The national daily, *The Muslim*, has already had a woman editor and the Karachi office of *Agence France Press* news agency is presently headed by a woman.



Even then, men continue to dominate. Indeed, the Pakistani experience has shown that ascending up the media ladder for women is no easy feat because remaining at the top is more tricky than reaching there.

At the same time, the Pakistani experience has borne out the fact that if women media managers are to have any influence over gender issues, they must command a brief portfolio that matches their position.

Being at the top on its own bare account could ring quite hollow as brought out by the words of Zubedia Mustafa, assistant editor of the *Dawn* who says of ascension thus: "You think you can reach the top but after a certain level, you find yourself shut out. As long as you don't upset the apple-cart, as long as their ideas are not threatened, they are willing to allow you concessions. You can try new ideas in peripheral areas like the magazine sections, but not in the news and opinion pages which are the heart of the paper."

These sentiments are all the more instructive when one considers the fact that *Dawn* employs 19 women but none in the newsroom because women are invariably consigned to feature writing.

On the other hand, there are attitudinal problems to be faced by women who climb up the ladder especially where male editors are colleagues who continue to treat women as sexual objects and therefore try to keep them in their "place" which usually means writing about how to keep husbands happy and compiling the agony column.

"Men in the Urdu language do not think we are capable of writing on politics and other serious issues," says Sheen Farrudh, first woman city editor of the Urdu daily *Marshiq*.

The dilemma facing Pakistani female media is not in any way peculiar and indeed, Kenyan women media practitioners have similarly constrained by reciprocal drawbacks.

While serving as the Managing Editor of the *Standard on Sunday*, Ms Esther Kamweru observed that while women faced a problem of under representation in the media they had to live with a suffocating general belief that women in the media could handle only "soft topics" such as social affairs, culture and health as opposed to business, economics and politics which were considered "hard news".

It is probably this mentality which explains why presently there is no woman media practitioner serving on the business desk of any newspaper and none among political commentators.

This dilemma is equally reflected in work assignments where a common complaint often voiced by female media practitioners has been that relating to the nature of work assignment. Male editors have constantly been accused of showing an open bias against female reporters by assigning them women-related jobs while assigning their men colleagues tough assignments.

The starting point in the process of creating change must be a reflection on the nature of assignments given to women media practitioners by acknowledging the fact that by the sheer strength of professional aptitude and skills, both male and female media practitioners are equal to the task.

Newsroom media assignments must, therefore, seek to promote gender equity by breaking down on traditional editorial mindset which are always at pains to distinguish men from women in the nature of assignments doled out. Even as women seek a greater and firmer foothold within the mainstream media, there is an equal if not similar need for them to look at other alternative media, in a bid to enhance their scope for dissemination of gender issues through positive information channels within a broader context.

This means that over and above the mainstream media, there is the added need to identify the potential and scope of the traditional modes of communication which includes the folklore media and cultural events whose full potential is yet to be harnessed.

The traditional media has its own untapped potential in the dissemination of gender values especially among rural communities where the mainstream media cannot attend to the peculiar needs of illiterate folk.

Over and above this, however, there is need to build and open up avenues through which the mainstream media and the traditional media can be married off to compliment each other as gender education skills.



Here, one needs to acknowledge the significance of vernacular radio stations which have an enviable outreach among rural populations. Such vernacular radio stations should be exploited as viable alternative approaches to gender sensitization among rural communities particularly in fighting abhorrent practices such as female genital mutilation still holding sway in some rural communities.



By an experienced female journalist with long media experience

## **Summary**

The paper argues that a gender policy statement for any organisation is an affirmation of fairness and social justice. The policy framework should thus spell out the values, principles and vision to guide it. It should also include a methodological approach for its application and clear goals and strategies for its implementation.

The paper notes that in Kenya, most media houses lack an institutionalised gender policy as part of the overall media policy. Lack of such a mainstreamed gender policy leads to different and *ad hoc* approaches to gender issues coverage.

The paper recommends that all the media personnel, both men and women should be involved in the development of and implementation of an appropriate gender policy. The paper therefore recommends strongly the need to integrate gender issues into the mainstream media houses. It also recommends affirmative action in the hiring and promotion policies of media houses to facilitate gender equity in media decision-making structures.

The paper also recommends the need to introduce gender issues at the level of training institutions e.g. School of Journalism at the university level.

The following is the full text of this paper:

## **I. DEVELOPING A GENDER POLICY**

Developing a policy statement on gender and development is a fundamental step in promoting equity in an organisation's activities and its structure.

A gender policy statement is an affirmation of the organisation's commitment to fairness and social justice and includes:

- An assessment of the problem;
- A description of the values, principles and vision that will guide the policy;
- A methodical approach to applying the policy through the departments of the organisation;
- Clear goals, strategies and guidelines for implementation.

It may be part of an existing policy document or a separate statement.

## **Findings**

Local media organisations are largely gender-blind in their operational policies, preferring to go by the dictates of press ethics in specific instances of coverage of women. These include reporting of rape cases, for example, where the victim may not be named in order to protect her privacy.

Unlike the British tabloid press, Kenyan media traditionally shy away from sexually explicit photographs and stories – mainly because Kenyan society is very conservative about such matters and the notion of the “family” newspaper still holds sway. Nevertheless, the concept of the “Girl of the week” continues to enjoy favour in the Kiswahili press and Page 9 of the **East African Standard** comes as close to treating women as sex objects as Kenyan society will stand for. This, according to reliable sources, is directly linked to attracting attention and playing up to the perceived interests of certain sections of society.

Media policies, it appears, are directly tied to the personal values of the chief executive of the day and deference to gender considerations may hold water only insofar as they do not go against



commercial interests. Whatever the personal inclination of the editors, the circulation war among newspapers and the profit margin conspire in favour of “news that will sell” rather than what has been termed as the “ordinariness” of women’s concerns and needs.

This is particularly so with regard to issues such as the women’s page, which some institutions carry purely because of their appeal to advertisers of consumer products. Women are a clearly identifiable segment of the buying public; they may not have the money but they often do the shopping and thus can influence what the family buys and uses. Smart sales executives often fall back on this to influence the inclusion of women’s pages. This trend has given rise to the rise of magazines ostensibly serving the interests of women but actually created with the advertisers in mind.

The absence of cohesive gender policies sometimes leads to different approaches to the women’s agenda within publications from the same stable. Whereas the *Daily Nation* has rejected the notion of a “women’s page”, for example, the *Sunday Nation* devotes several pages each week to **Femalestyle** in its magazine section and *Taifa Leo* is (in)famous for its girl of the week.

It is not that Kenyan media are blatantly sexist. On the contrary, women’s conferences and issues have often received optimum coverage, such as the Beijing conference and seminars such as the 1996 Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance workshop organised by the Task Force on Laws Relating to Women.

However, prevailing policies and standards are not based on a systematic approach to redressing the gender imbalances. They are on focus and depth and point to a need to consolidate current positive practices and develop formal, wide-ranging gender policies covering portrayal of women in news, advertisements, photography and language and their representation in terms of news content and presence in management.

In order to ensure that policy is consistent and is translated into practice, members of staff and professional organisers such as the Kenya Union of Journalists and the Association of Media Women in Kenya must be involved in the development of gender policy statements.

## **II. MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUITY**

Integrating gender considerations into media work requires that gender roles and relations –which are absolutely essential to the well being of humanity in general –are taken into account at all stages. These include newsgathering, writing and editing and media management.

Policies should also focus on standards for audio-visual presentation of women in photography, cartoon strips and advertisements. The ultimate goal should be to ensure that women and men are treated equally and fairly in media coverage and given equal opportunities in terms of participation, leadership, access to benefits and control over decision-making.

## **Findings**

While they are conscious of the gender imbalances at all levels, it appears that organisations have yet to mobilise the commitment to address the problem formally. One senior editor indicated his personal sense of embarrassment at the fact that women ‘only ever attend senior managers’ meetings in his organisation in a deputising capacity when their bosses are away.

In another instance, the explanation was proffered that media policies have no direct elements dealing with gender issues primarily because the whole gender - sensitivity question is relatively new and it has not quite filtered through to top management. Gender - business is not confined to top management. In situations where reporters and editors are called upon to solicit comments and responses to breaking news from public sources, it is very rare that they seek out female newsmakers –unless the issue is of direct concern to women.

Women get short shrift from the media, it seems, not so much because of conscious discrimination but as a carryover from the male domination of society. And so it is that when a gang of bank robbers



includes two women, this becomes the headline. Traditionally, women are not supposed to be gangsters and this stereotyping is handed down in the perceptions and write-ups of journalists.

There have also been cases where female journalists have been denied senior appointments simply because of their gender. A journalist who was a middle-level manager in a newspaper office in the mid-80s reports that she was denied a promotion on the grounds that she could not be called out on night duty because she was “somebody’s wife” —and this despite the fact that she had been acting in that position for quite a while and doing a good job.

## **Affirmative Action or Mainstreaming**

One of the most important issues in incorporating gender concerns in the media is whether to develop women - specific approaches or to integrate equity into existing structures. The case for and against affirmative action needs to be perceived from the wider viewpoint.

On the one hand, proponents of affirmative action put forward the argument that it is unrealistic and unfair to expect a group of people who have been oppressed and disadvantaged systematically over a long period of time to compete on equal terms with those who have had years of experience. It is like asking a toddler to compete with Ben Johnson in the 100 metres Olympic race. They point to the virtues of a level playing field for all competitors.

On the other hand, opponents of affirmative action refer to numerous pitfalls that arise from appointments and concessions based on special pleading. Nothing illustrates this dilemma more than the women’s page. Modelled basically on the Western perception of women’s issues and priorities, the traditional women’s page ends to dwell exclusively on fashion, beauty, cookery and what amounts to little more than gossip.

The message is clear: Men deal with the serious business that belongs in hard news and women would dwell to confine themselves to domestic issues and a life of leisure. The daily hardships and poverty that the majority of women, who live in the rural areas, have to contend with are not considered to be “sexy” enough to be of interest to the average reader. Even where such pages serve as a platform to highlight women’s concerns, they often end up as “ghettos” designated as being of interest to women only.

Women-specific approaches in managerial appointments can also be counter-productive where such appointments are not based on merit. “Token” managers cannot in the long run be useful role models to women aspiring to leadership positions since they may well end up spending most of their time appeasing their benefactors and playing up to their interests rather than concentrating on doing a good job.

Besides the danger that token appointees may end up being honorary men — being more of men than men themselves, according to one of the few women who have broken into management in the media — appointments not based on merit are often not accompanied by any power, leading to ineffectiveness.

Even where women break through the proverbial glass ceiling purely on merit, they often find themselves operating outside of the old boy’s network and suffer a terrible sense of isolation. Lack of support from female peers may slowly lead to their becoming part and parcel of the gender-insensitive system. And, of course, there is the Queen Bee Syndrome, where those who have arrived will strive to make it as difficult as possible to newcomers to gain a foothold because they want all the glory and stardom to themselves.

In the broadcast media, women-specific approaches have been used to generate radio and television programmes targeted at women. They have been useful in the sense that even those women in rural areas who have no access to information on a regular basis sometimes listen to the radio. These programmes are aired at times that women are supposedly at home on their own and, therefore, have access to the radio and the time to listen as they go about their domestic chores. The major question in this case is the content of the messages going out to the women and the creativity



with which gender issues are approached.

While women-specific approaches can be useful in the short term—particularly if they are designed to upgrade women's skills and instill confidence in them — they are often counter-productive and ineffective and may well reinforce stereotyping and further marginalise women.

Media organisations should aspire instead to develop a level playing field (taking into account the multiple roles, stereotyping and discrimination that women face) that will inspire female journalists to participate effectively and in meaningful numbers in decision-making processes at all levels of management within the media. It is only when a critical mass of females is achieved that the female perspective can be internalized within the organisation.

The responsibility for integrating gender concerns into media activities and policy must be clearly assigned in order to institutionalize the process throughout an organisation. This should ideally be undertaken at senior management level such as managing editor or training editor, where there is one, to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation.

### **III. GENDER INTEGRATION TRAINING**

In order to incorporate gender concerns into their work, media agencies must provide their staff with training in gender sensitivity and the tools required to put gender equity into operation. Current experience indicates that this training is necessary as much for senior management as for the correspondents working in the provinces and districts.

Training may take the form of a widely-distributed manual such as this one and written policy statements and housestyle manuals that lay down precise rules on the do's and don'ts on all aspects of gender issues and events.

### **Findings**

Current practice in most media organisations suggests that where training in general is undertaken, it is upon offers by donor organisations and groups that have a particular interest in media development. Much of this training centres around developing the professional skills of journalists. Though there is more interest in ethical issues, the gender dimension is rarely given the attention it deserves. More often than not, it is individual journalists who have an interest in this area that go out of their way to seek training in gender issues.

One of the most innovative attempts to redress this situation is the short courses currently being conducted by the United States International University - Africa, which have focused on the gender question, among other social and ethical issues affecting the development of the media in this country.

There are several opportunities to impart gender training to media personnel: One of the first steps would be to introduce this as a subject at the university level and in tertiary institutions such as the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication and the All Africa Conference of Churches training centre, among others.

Even though the trend is to recruit journalists with professional training, many media houses have ongoing in-house training sessions for their own staff either through retreats and workshops or by recruiting senior journalists as training editors. Gender awareness may be incorporated into these sessions, perhaps including input from consultants in gender training.

Consultancy work in gender training is currently available from a number of non-governmental agencies such as the Collaborative Centre for Gender Training, the National Commission on the Status of Women, ABANTU for Development and others.

In order for this approach to be effective, however, there must be a constant review process and a commitment to effect the changes called for. Where staff take the initiative themselves, they should be assured of support from decision-makers within the organisations.



## **IV. SUPPORT FOR GENDER INTEGRATION BY SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

In order for gender equity principles to become part and parcel of a media organisation's activities and policies, there must be support and leadership from senior management — right down from the publishers and the chief executive.

Freedom of the press notwithstanding, publishers often enjoy immense powers over the direction of editorial policy. Enlisting their support to challenge exploitation of the female gender is, therefore, essential. Top-level editors, too, do not only carry internal managerial clout but also have the opportunity to "speak" to the world through editorials and leader pages and thereby influence current thinking. It is for this reason that the absence of a critical mass of gender sensitized male and female decision-makers is greatly felt.

### **Findings**

In one of the most successful illustrations of gender-sensitive management making a difference, the former managing editor of *The Weekly Review*, Ms. Sarah Elderkin, proved in 1990 that it is possible to challenge negative portrayal of women in advertising and effect changes. To appreciate the importance of this move, it is necessary to understand the commercial workings of the media. Advertising, in most cases, is the economic mainstay of publications and it is the bold media manager indeed who dares risk stepping on the toes of those who pay their salaries.

Greatly riled by an advertisement exploiting women and kinky sex to sell a pick-up vehicle, Ms. Elderkin rejected an artwork from an advertising agency and wrote a protest note to the vehicle firm pointing out the offensive language and illustration. Contrary to expectations, the company made an apology and replaced the advert. Soon after, it was withdrawn from the market altogether.

The lesson here is clearly that the relationship between the advertisers and other media is symbiotic: One needs the other to survive the thrive. It is, therefore, possible to engage in dialogue not only on gender issues but also on all matters of ethics.

The media organisations surveyed indicate a general absence of women in the top echelons of power, including boards of directors and other positions of power and influence. The one woman who was on the board of directors of the county's major newspaper group recently retired, despite clear indications that there was need for greater representation of women at that level.

Media organisations should be encouraged to appoint more women to key positions of influence using tools such as petitions and fronting names of potential candidates for leadership positions, especially in the case of boards elected at shareholders' meetings. This kind of work can only be carried out effectively by a lobby group dedicated to monitoring the status of women in national institutions and actively engaging in gender sensitization campaigns.

## **V. GENDER EQUITY IN INTERNAL MANAGEMENT**

### **Representation of Women in Management Positions**

Media agencies are more likely to boost their chances of achieving gender equity by increasing women's access to status, power and decision-making within their own organisations.

While it is possible for men to demonstrate gender sensitivity, women are often better placed to raise issues that are of particular concern to women. This view seems to enjoy currency in editorial circles too. According to the estimation of a senior editor in the national press, when it comes to allocation of work, there is a 60:40 chance of a female journalist being sent to cover a woman's seminar as opposed to a male one.



It is, therefore, imperative that media organisations actively recruit and promote women with a gender focus into management positions, both at head office and in the field as bureau chiefs and correspondents.

## **Findings**

The media's track record in this area is dismal, with only one woman having ever risen to the position of managing editor of a daily newspaper and another as managing editor of a political news magazine. Another mere handful have risen to lower level posts such as special projects editor, associate editor, production editor, bureau chief. There are relatively more women in government service as radio and TV producers but the numbers are so minimal that they can barely have an impact on policy.

One of the difficulties that media managers refer to when it comes to promotion of women to management levels is the absence of a pool of sufficiently large numbers of reporters to draw on. Media work is tough and demanding, both for men and women, and it is patience and endurance that pays dividends in the long run.

Various reasons are put forward for this: Rising through the ranks often takes a long time in the media and staying in power is crucial; lack of role models is greatly felt, especially in the print media where there have only been about five or so women to occupy top-level decision-making positions.

Women also are apparently perceived as not having the drive of confidence to fight for what they believe in or what they want and so they easily get overlooked. Female journalists, on the other hand, view this last point as the key issue — contending that whenever a management post arises, the last person to be thought of will be the female candidate.

They cite stereotyping and consistent assignment to “soft” stories as being among the major drawbacks to their progress. The tendency is to link women and features both in terms of media coverage and also in terms of job assignment. They are hardly to be found on the news desk or sub-editors' desk, yet those are the most likely jobs to lead into top management.

## **Gender and the Recruitment Process**

In order to redress the gender imbalance in media organisations, specific strategies for recruiting, retaining and promoting women into senior management positions need to be put in place.

According to available statistics, the level of enrollment in journalism schools is getting closer to the 50-50 level, yet this is not reflected in the newsroom of most media organisations and especially the print media. Empirical evidence suggests that women in the media tend to drift into public relations, government service and alternative media where the pressures of production are greatly reduced.

The belief that the media is very much a macho world, which is decidedly hostile to women with aspirations to family life, continues to hold sway. Yet the reality is that media work is no more demanding in terms of working hours and high pressure than nursing or medicine, where women work long night shifts and are sometimes on call 24 hours a day.

It has been suggested, tongue in cheek perhaps that in the case of doctors and nurses, social status compensates for the hard work and tough régime whereas journalism is still very much an unstructured career line considered to be somewhat disreputable — much along the lines of the CID. Besides, there do not appear to be strictly laid down career development structures, a great deal depending on an individual's personal capacities and drive. So, how can media organisations fare in the recruitment stakes?

## **Findings**

The practice on the ground differs from organisation to organisation. In one of the major media houses, for example, there are few women in the newsroom but most of the Nairobi correspondents



are female. They are often professionals in other fields who have been attracted by the glamour of media work. On acceptance, they are given a crash-on-the-job “training” and left to their own devices in terms of generating and following up stories. It is cheaper for the media house because such correspondents are paid by the centimetre of the stories published and organisation has no other commitment to the individual.

In yet another organisation, there are 12 female journalists in an establishment of 103. This organisation reports on occasion having done head-hunting through the School of Journalism. Targeted students are invited to do their industrial attachment at the organisation, during which time they are assessed. In one instance, four of such students were recruited — three of them female.

Several strategies were cited as methods of boosting the numbers of women in media organisations including replacement of departing female employees by fellow women and deliberately seeking out and attracting female employees with potential. Ultimately however a lot will depend on what they do with the opportunity thus presented to them.

## **Equal opportunity policies**

Ensuring equity calls for management practices such as gender sensitivity in recruitment, acceptable working conditions and opportunities for career development and promotion.

Such practices would include career guidance talks in schools and colleges and advertisements clearly stating that women are encouraged to apply or that the organisation is an equal opportunities employer. Equal opportunities would demand that any internal posts are advertised and standards and criteria for promotion set out in clear and precise terms. They would imply developing systems of equal pay for the same work and classifying jobs of equal value as the basis for determining seniority. And, most of all, equal opportunities demand that women are not penalized for their reproductive role and denied the chance to take on greater responsibility at work.

## **Family-friendly work policies**

Since women are often the care-takers in their families, it is necessary for media agencies to develop policies that enable them to balance their work and family life and take on management jobs without adversely affecting their families.

It is a sad judgement of the media that the few women who have struggled their way into management levels consistently report doing so at great personal cost and sacrifice on their part and that of their families. Some women say they have even foregone marriage in order to build their careers. Ironically, even though they have tried hard to live by the rules, the same organisations have turned their backs on them come promotion time.

Family friendly policies should include adequate provisions for maternity leave and formal leave for the care of sick children. Other options include flexible working hours and arrangements such as part-time work with benefits and opportunities to work from home or to move temporarily to a more enabling working environment without loss of seniority.

This has indeed happened at the informal level where maternity and medical conditions that are incompatible with stress have been taken into account in allocating staff appropriate duties. But this, once again, depends entirely on the personal inclinations of the chief executive.

## **Training and Career Development Policies**

Media houses actively seeking to encourage women to seek decision-making and leadership positions could also adopt the strategy of identifying those with potential and nurturing them in the profession.

Even though systematic advanced training for staff does not seem to feature strongly in media organisations at the present moment, it is also a fact that media foundations constantly organise



short professional development courses and study tours that serve to broaden the horizons of journalists or simply seek to focus their attention on some ethical aspect. These offer a window of opportunity for both male and female journalists that should not be taken lightly.

One media organisation reported having consciously identified a female writer in a rare specialisation and sending her to high-profile national and international events to raise her experience and exposure to different challenges in order to literally develop her skills in her specialisation.

Though there are no formal provisions for mentoring in the workplace, those women who have made it into management report having a personal mentor — sometimes within the same organisation, sometimes not — who have been their source of inspiration and “guru” at difficult times. This is an idea worth pursuing further and there should be provision for mentoring programmes where both male and female journalists with potential are attached to more experienced colleagues and nurtured in the profession.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

It is apparent from a survey undertaken for this paper that media organisations’ policies, whether formal or informal, have not taken into serious account the gender question. Indeed, it seems that the media are governed more by the commercial interest than the interests of the female gender or any other focus group for that matter.

For all their sins of omission and commission, however, media organisations protest that they do not practise conscious discrimination against women. The whole gender question is obviously tied to the status of women in society in general and the socialization that journalists —both male and female — receive in the outside world.

Nevertheless, the media do have a major role to play as agents of social change. The power of the media to influence public thinking cannot be downplayed. This is especially so in terms of changing societal attitudes to women and providing the leadership and direction that will facilitate the improvement of women’s status.

The first step in this direction is the media to clean their own house first. This can only be achieved by taking stock of their own position and actively seeking to redress the prevailing problems. This requires a concerted effort set down very clearly and concisely in policy guidelines that cover the full range of the gender question both within and without the organisations. This paper is a small contribution to forging a clear path in that direction.

## **CHECKLIST FOR A GENDER SENSITIVE POLICY**

### **I. Developing a Gender-Sensitive Policy**

- An assessment of the problem
- Description of the values, principles and vision guiding the policy
- System for applying policy throughout the organisation
- Clear goal, strategies and guidelines for implementation

### **II. Mainstreaming gender Equity**

- Equal opportunities for participation, leadership, access to benefits and control over decision-making
- Women-specific or mainstream?
- Monitoring and evaluation

### **III .Gender Integration Training**

- What is gender sensitivity?
- Tools for putting gender equity into operation
- How do we convey the message?

### **IV. Support from Senior Management**

- Leadership from the powers-that-be
- Women needs to be present at all levels of management
- Powerful women can make a difference

### **V. Gender Equity in Internal Management**

- Increasing women's access to status, power and decision-making
- Strategies for recruiting, retaining and promoting women
- Equal opportunity practices
- Family-friendly policies
- Training and career development





By two female gender trainers and civic educators with long experience in public life and the women's movement

## Summary

In this sector, we examine and analyse the strategies and alternatives the female gender in Kenya can employ in order to set a gender agenda for the media, instead of waiting for the media to do it for them. In other words, the argument made here is that, whereas the male dominated media may be gender insensitive, women have not exploited all the opportunities, spaces and strategies open to them to gender sensitize the media and demand to have their voices heard.

This section therefore identifies and discusses some of the options the female gender can employ to make the gender agenda become an integral part of the media agenda. The strategies suggested include:

- making direct and specific contacts with the media, and seeking to contribute to national and international issues through press statements, interviews and conferences;
- forming a media focussed lobby group to put pressure for gender sensitive policy changes and monitor the implementation of gender policy changes.

The paper also makes some recommendations of direct relevance to women leaders in general and women politicians in particular.

## The Female Gender Setting Agenda For the Media

The objective of **The Female Gender Setting Agenda for the Media** is to strategize on how women can prevail upon the media to mainstream their concerns. Indeed, mainstreaming the Female Gender, seeks to give women a voice and visibility in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination of it by the media. Thus, within the context of media coverage and presentation of the female gender, it is a fact that women are not given enough (equal to the male gender) space to voice their concerns or to ensure that their invisibility is even problematized. In this context, the media women should play a leading role in influencing other women to demand and assert new spaces for the de-construction of the knowledge creation and dissemination process by the media.

The female gender must endeavour to transform the media perception on what makes news or who should make news. Prevalent news values define women and women's problems and concerns as unnewsworthy. Hence, treatment of the female gender by the media is best described as narrow. It concentrates on mundane and trivial matters. It is Margaret Gallagher who has said that women in the news coverage appear primarily "as wives, mothers or daughters of men in the news". Women in their own right make "headlines usually only as fashionable or entertainment figures" (Margaret Gallagher, 1987:71). For example, the Samburu woman who killed a lion single-handedly should have been highlighted by the print and electronic media.

Media, as a means of communication must be available to all men and women who want it and need it to articulate their concerns to the general public. That the female gender does not enjoy the media coverage and usage does not need more emphasis. This means that changes must be instituted in the media policy and structure to accommodate the voices of all those who have been left out. Women must struggle to ensure that the concerns of the female gender are integrated into the entire media activities and are made a routine concern of all media staff.



Women must develop some interest in knowing what is going on in the nation in particular and the world in general by reading newspapers (dailies), magazines, listening to radio and television. Women should watch documentaries on women on video tapes. In this context, it is important to educate women on the importance of media coverage, how to approach the media personnel and the need to make their views known to the rest of the public through proper media coverage. In Kenya, the female gender must struggle to get their story told to the public simply because, it never has been a habit to send reporters to cover women's activities and functions. Rural women groups should be encouraged to use the media. One strategy which women could use to deal with this problem of non-coverage of their functions by the media is to advocate setting up action line and special columns for them in the mainstream media. These columns should report on problems and activities taking place which affect or involve them. Another strategy should be to develop a manual to provide guidelines for women on how to work with the media. The manual will also provide a methodology of how non-media women can reach the media. This will demystify the working of the media and will also provide the necessary media education for women.

The media should inform and empower women. However, it is important to recognise women's limitations and their failure to enjoy the use of the mass media facilities. Few women read newspapers or have access to them. Most rural women are none-readers, and therefore have no access to newspapers. It is necessary to reach out to these women by using a different medium of communication. Communication among women groups in rural areas is extremely important. It is essential to select alternative ways of communication which illiterate women can identify with. One strategy is to form community information centres where women can sit and listen to radio, watch television or video tapes. If this happens and it reaches women in rural and urban areas in large numbers, then women will have a women's mass movement in this country.

There are female ways of communicating which are more effective than for example the use of print and television. Female ways of communicating are usually face to face and at the level of equals communicating to shape ideas. This medium of communication could be used to communicate to women through audio-visuals. Women in social meeting place i.e women's groups could record their ideas and discussions and then later play back their recording. This would help to generate new ideas among themselves. For example, a recording on legal rights or what the constitution say about women's rights or income-generating activities/projects should be recorded in the vernacular languages of that people and then played to them. Such recording would stimulate women to discuss issues which affect them at the community level.

The mass media has been instrumental in reinforcing and maintaining the traditional stereotypes about the female gender. Indeed, it will be useful for women to know that in the traditional societies, women had their own informal communication systems, whether it be exchanging news and information around a village or market. With the advent of mass communication and sophisticated technology, women have been left out. Similarly, the control of the mass media - except for programmes produced by the UN and for such magazines in Kenya as in **Presence**, **Parents**, and **We** - is solidly in the hands of men. As a result, women are virtually absent from 'important' news of the nation, whether transmitted by radio, television or print media. News on women usually focuses on messages on how women should behave. For example, the recent public attacks on the so called indecently dressed women. The problem is intensified by the media presentation of the partial or falsified information on the female gender. For example, the woman's place is in the home, or women are dependent upon men or women do not make important and independent decisions. Women must find a forum to correct this falsified and distorted information about their images.

Media women must set the agenda by documenting all the scattered important contributions made by women. For example, the achievements and contributions made by the chairperson of the greenbelt movement in Kenya should be documented and disseminated. Similarly, the achievements and contributions made by the chairperson of the anti-rape association in Kenya should be documented and disseminated. In fact, the documentation of contributions made by women should be taken seriously because they provide the model for other women to follow.



For women to set the agenda for the media, more players beyond women journalists must be involved. This must include women's lobby groups and non-governmental organisations as well as key women leaders in the country. This will also operate at the level of political lobbying. For example, UNICEF will lobby the Attorney-General on issues of violence against the female gender. Some issues which affect women are too serious to be left in the hands of female journalists alone.

People who run the media exercise considerable amount of power. It is the power to confer importance to information and status on individuals. Indeed, men and women can earn status in their communities if they get the attention of the media. For example, when a woman is appointed as an Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Education, to downplay her new status, the media reporting and focus is on the fact that she had defected from another party to the ruling party. Similarly, after the Minister of Finance presented a budget speech, a female minister's picture appeared next to the analysis of the budget speech to show that the budget was gender sensitive although the lady minister was not asked to comment on the budget at all by the news reporters. Although these lady ministers appeared in the press, it was not in a favourable context. The media can raise certain individuals to prominence and thus put them into advantageous positions for leadership and personal profit. The reverse is also true: that if the media can refuse to pay attention to a person, it is nearly impossible to achieve public status and recognition. Most women belong in this category. In this connection, it is important for women to impress upon media houses to give female gender related assignments to journalists who are more responsive to women's interests and concerns.

While the media do not determine the way people think about public issues, they do set the stage for discussion and decisions on what people will talk or debate about. The mass media have blocked the elaborate and contemporary debates and discussions on women issues by either giving them a partial coverage or completely ignoring them. As a result, the general public (including some women) has remained ignorant of issues affecting women and how they have come about. The media are in a powerful position to popularize the agenda for the female gender because they (media) control what people will talk, debate and discuss about, think about and what issues will receive public attention and proceed to some kind of affirmative action or resolution.

Another strategy to ensure that the concerns of the female gender are incorporated and integrated into the mainstream media is to set-up women's alternative media. The alternative feminist media will provide space for women to freely express themselves in their own language and words on concerns and issues which affect them. These alternative media will strengthen women's ability and voices to be heard in the public. Alternative media will provide space for women to discuss their concerns and to offer support to other women and to seek comments from their readers.

For a long time, women have been asking other people to do things for them including creation and dissemination of information. The media coverage is also heavily influenced by patriarchal attitudes. It is also important to remember that information is power. Control over sources of information would influence power relations in society. Therefore, the establishment of women's alternative media will not only give them control over their information and ideas but will influence the gender power sharing arrangements in society.

Women's alternative media will give women power to control their own ideas. Women, through such media, will assume the power to define what to say, to who and how to say it. The alternative media will give women the capacity to include contents which are not commonly found in the mainstream print media like abortion, sexuality, women's health, violence against women and news of the women's movement. Indeed, as a strategy for the female gender setting agenda for the media, it is time for the Kenyan women to start an alternative print media to market women's issues and debate on pertinent feminist concerns in society.

A women's media will reach more women and challenge the rights of established print and electronic media and thus initiate active public debates on women's concerns. A women's alternative media will provide women with an opportunity to define their own identities, document their experiences and women's own stories in their own words. The women's media will also document evidence on how women have been denied voice and the ways in which they have resisted.



The objective of setting up a women's alternative media is to ensure that the concerns of the female gender are incorporated in the mainstream print and electronic media. Once the women's alternative media are established, with time, issues which affect the female gender will gradually slip over into the general mainstream media.

It is also important to establish some mechanisms for diffusing responsibility for the integration of the female gender concerns into the mainstream media. These mechanisms should include media staff gender training, media staff gender guidelines and develop media staff gender tool kit. All these three mechanisms will facilitate the process of integration and incorporation of female gender issues in the mainstream media. Clearly, setting up an alternative media for women will demonstrate to the general public and established media houses that women will no longer feel content with the old media perception and reporting that have never fully incorporated them.

Another way that women can try to transform the media is through activism. This activism will be achieved through the formation of a lobby group of women journalists. The lobby group will be a well organised, systematic mechanism to monitor and check content of the mainstream to challenge any negative reporting about women. This lobby group will also incorporate and involve other women activist groups. The lobby group will be one major tool that women will use to pressurize the media houses to do what they want.

The lobby group must have a strong mobilizing capacity to lobby for opportunities in the press. The lobby must call upon women NGOs to support them on female gender issues as they are portrayed in the media. Basically, the lobby will respond to the mass media sexist portrayal of women in advertising. The lobby will challenge and fight the media to develop advertising policies that opposed sexist advertising.

At the moment, there is no forum to comment or react on any negative media reporting on women. Indeed, there is a vacuum which must be filled to rectify the situation. The formation of a lobby group will provide a forum for advocacy to point out the main concerns for women. The lobby group will monitor what the media says about women. It will be the responsibility of the lobby to prevail upon the print media to withdraw and apologize whenever they carry any negative reporting on women. In fact, at the moment, when women are misquoted by the print media, they don't know how to react to it because, they don't have a forum to do that for them. The lobby group, if well organised, can be fairly objective and could be one strategy which would enable women to set the agenda for the media.

It is also important to train women on how to package their information so that it becomes newsworthy. This training on media information packaging will enable women to say what they want in a more favourable manner in order to attract the attention of the media. This training will be important for all women involved in public life especially women leaders. There is therefore, a need to strengthen the linkage between female gender issues and the concerns of the male gender.

Another strategy of mainstreaming the concerns of the female gender is to recruit and increase women working in the mainstream media organisations who are gender sensitive. These media women should struggle to start an editorial to focus on issues affecting the female gender. Similarly, to make the work of media women easy, the media lobby group should target Chief-editors to ensure that women's issues become a routine part of the leading dailies and magazines.

Apart from integrating gender issues into the mainstream media, we think it is also necessary to encourage women professionals in various technical fields, to comment on national and international issues e.g. economic, political and legal issues, in the same manner male professionals give their opinions on these issues. Indeed, Kenya now has a large pool of women economists, lawyers and political scientists, whose views on the national and international issues should be heard. It is not enough merely to comment only when gender issues are involved. For this change to be actualised, the media need to consciously seek women's views on "hard" news; the same way they seek them on "soft" or gender type news. Similarly, women themselves should make a conscious effort to seek out the media and insist on their views on certain issues being heard.

This last point is especially pertinent to women leaders, especially those seeking political office. In our view, women leaders and politicians in particular need sensitization on the ways that they could



set an agenda for the media, through, among others, availing themselves for media interviews, press conferences and initiating regular statements for the media in topical issues that attract media attention. They should therefore, as a matter of strategy;

- establish a think tank to assist with news analysis and interaction with the media.
- establish specific personal contacts and a good relationship with the media.
- accept media invitations to talk shows and press interviews.
- initiate news conferences when they have an important message for the public.
- Prepare press releases on topical national issues.

But ultimately, it is only through the total democratisation of society that women would have access to proper and accurate information on the one hand and adequate media coverage of their activities and concerns on the other.



**SECTION III**

**The Story of Akinyi and Others**



# 11 WEARING GENDER LENSES, IN MEDIA COVERAGE, PORTRAYAL AND ACTION: THE STORY OF AKINYI AND OTHERS

Akinyi has just passed with distinction in her K.C.P.E. Examinations. But in addition, a leading local daily newspaper has offered her a four year scholarship in a leading high cost National High School.

In response to Akinyi's good performance, her parents have organised a party to celebrate this important achievement. Akinyi's aunt, a journalist is also in attendance. Since her early childhood, Akinyi had always admired her journalist aunt. Infact, she has harboured secret ambitions of training as a journalist herself.

She has indeed promised herself to reciprocate the generosity of the local newspaper for the scholarship by working towards becoming a journalist after completing her education. Music was in abundance. From where aunt Jessica was, it appeared as if she was enjoying herself, with the food and music. This was until she stormed out in protest, shouting to everyone that, if the music was not put off she would go away. Little Akinyi was shocked, what had come over her Auntie?

The lyrics were something like this:

### Swahili (original)

*Mwanamke hatosheki  
Nilimnunulia lorry ya pombe  
Akaimeza kwa siku tatu.*

### English translation

A woman does not get enough  
I bought her a lorry full of booze  
She swallowed it in three days

Yet another said.

### Swahili (original)

*Mwanamke akiwa manga'a  
Mrudishe kwao .....  
Na hesabu gharama .....*

### English translation

If a woman is big-headed, take her back to her home and count it as a loss.

A different one had earlier played:

### Swahili (original)

*Ndogo ndogo  
we si kidogo  
Nataka ndogo ndogo*

### English translation

Young chicklet  
you are not that young  
I like 'them' small.

There was even another one:

Nyambura, I love you  
Like fish and chips  
Nyambura, I love you  
Like Nyama Choma.

Akinyi did not understand, her auntie's reaction. She did not know what was wrong with the music, so she hurriedly followed her auntie to find out what had irritated her so much.

**AKINYI:** What is wrong with the music?

**AUNT:** Nothing, except that all these songs portray women in highly uncomplimentary terms. Every-thing is expressed in a very derogatory manner.

For example, when someone loves you like "fish and chips" or Nyama Choma", is your ego supposed to be boosted? Are you edible Akinyi? And what happens after digestion?

**AKINYI:** But I think that's just music. It doesn't mean it's true. And even then, that's how some women are.

**AUNT:** No, Akinyi. Music should be used to nurture and promote positive images of men and women in society, thereby nurturing equity and respect.

**AKINYI:** But, there is some grain of truth in the song.

**AUNT:** The point is that music is supposed to encourage the correction of such situations not making it worse through negative, stereotyped images of women as greedy, unfaithful, manipulative, sex symbols, exploitative, materialistic, alcoholics, liars, weak, gossips, cowards, fools, untrustworthy, jealous, etc.etc.

**AKINYI:** But that's the language everybody I know uses.

**AUNT:** That is why we must consciously try to change that situation, and start using language that is gender sensitive.

**AKINYI:** What is language that is gender sensitive?

**AUNT:** Let me ask you a few questions by way of answering you. What do you call a person who stands guard at a building or gate?

**AKINYI:** A Watchman.

**AUNT:** What about somebody who serves tea in an office?

**AKINYI:** A Tea Girl.

**AUNT:** What about somebody employed to work in the house?

**AKINYI:** That's a housemaid.

**AUNT:** That's exactly what I'm terming gender insensitive language. If you look at the answers you have given me, all are stereotypes of gender roles.

### **First Example:**

Recently, a female reader wrote to the *Daily Nation*, complaining about the use of "WATCHMAN" for the title of one of its popular columns. She said, correctly, that the word was discriminatory because it excluded women. The *Daily Nation* responded that word "man" was universally accepted to be inclusive of women, and that since the column was written by a man anyway, the issue of changing its title did not arise.



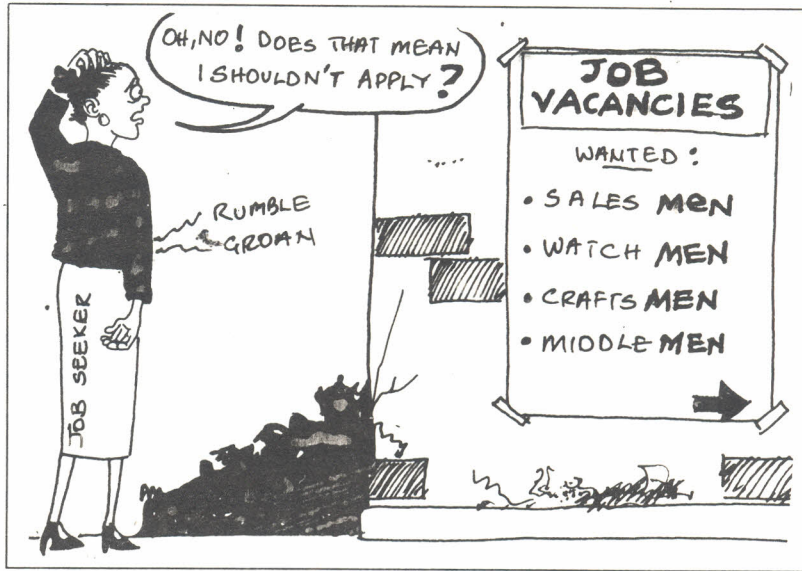
Some people still associate positions of power with men even when women occupy these positions



### Second Example:

A certain company wanted to advertise some senior positions in a local magazine. Listing the qualifications for the applicants, the advert said, "He should meet the following conditions ....." This reference to "He" ran throughout the advert. The editor, a woman, rang up the advertiser to find out if only males could apply for the job. Amused, the advertiser responded in the negative. Did they mind then, if the editor changed the wording to He/She to include women? More amused, the advertiser gave the go-ahead to the editor to do so.

Through such subtle use of language, the media has effectively contributed to the denial of women of access to opportunities and resources on an equal basis with men.



The media has effectively contributed to the denial of women of access to opportunities and resources

### Third Example:

Police in Manhunt for a woman in Sh. 19.5 million case.

"Police in Mombasa have launched a **manhunt** for a **woman** in connection with the theft of tea worth Sh. 19.5 Million from a godown ..... (a Local Daily, October 25, 1996.)"

This could have been gender sensitive if it read:

Police **hunt for the person** connected with...

### Fourth Example

When a gang of bank robbers includes two women, this becomes headline news precisely because, traditionally, women are not supposed to be gangsters.

### Fifth Example

A National Bank's Advert for the Vision Account runs as follows:

"Our children are the vision. They are the future. If you open a National Bank Vision Account for your **child**, you will be starting **him** on the long road to achievement. **Don't girls have a future too?**"

**AUNT:** Akinyi do you think nowadays there are women who do pottery?

**AKINYI:** Yes, very many, I was studying Art and Craft at School, and I used to make all sorts of items, sugar dish, ash trays, etc.

**AUNT:** Are you therefore a craftsman?

**AKINYI:** Well .... you see .....

**AUNT:** That's what I want you to see. We should stop stereotyping male or female gender roles into fixed positions in the society. For example, when you talk of a **maid**, you are suggesting that only women can do that work, when we know even men can and do it. When you talk of **dustbinman** or **doorman**, you are suggesting that only men are appropriate for these jobs. Akinyi, this shows that people must realize the need to be sensitive in their use of language and not ascribe fixed gender roles purely on the basis of sex.

### Example

Miller and Swift give the example of the American Department of Labour's Job title changes which now reflect gender neutrality: Some of these are:

<u>Gender Stereotyped</u>	<u>Gender Neutral</u>
Airline hostess/steward	- Flight attendant
Cameraman	- Camera Operator
Draftsman	- Drafter
Fisherman	- Fishmonger
Foreman	- Supervisor
Gateman	- Gate attendant
Maid	- House keeper
Salesman	- sales Agent
Pressman	- press Agent
Watchman	- Guard

These are but a few of the stereotyping of the male and female genders into certain roles in society.

## GENDER, LANGUAGE, AND MEDIA

AKINYI: But Auntie, this kind of language use is everywhere.

By this time, a number of young girls, Akinyi's friends, had surrounded Aunt Jessica wanting a proper explanation of her objection to the music. She explained a lot of things mainly touching on journalism and the media in general. But more specifically on the socio-cultural conditioning that are at the root of negative portrayal of women in the media, in language use and visual images.

She further explained that these problems are not only rooted in socio-cultural attitudes, but also in economic and political structures. It is all these that need to be changed in order to positively determine the place of the woman in the society.

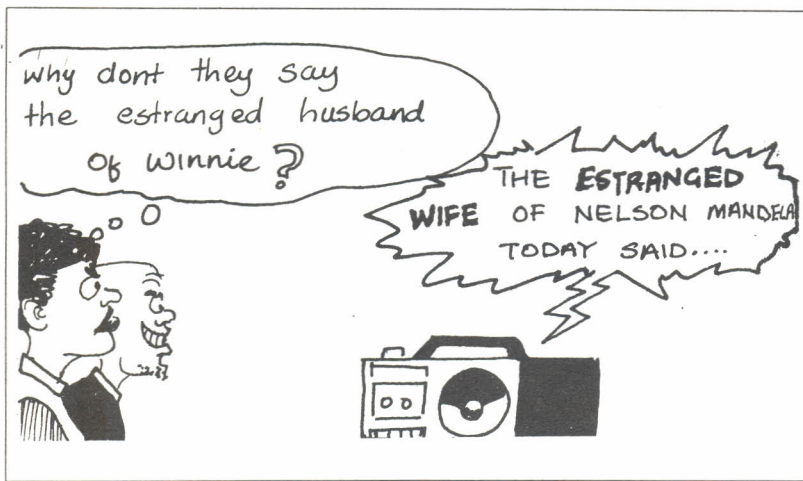
In explaining all these, she posed questions that the girls should ponder. She used illustrations and examples from everyday life. First, she talked about the songs that had been sang earlier. She asked her listeners to be careful in the use of language and cited several examples.

AUNT: When you read our newspapers you'll understand what I mean. For example, at one time, a local newspaper, on April Fools day put a joke which said that a **monkey** somewhere in Western Kenya had "**made noises and laughed like a woman**,"- meaning that women and monkeys communicate the same way.

In most cases women are looked at as appendages of males in our society. Just consider this: when a married couple divorces, it is the woman who is referred to as the **estranged wife** of the man. In our newspapers some people have written stories referring to their daughters as sources of wealth, as property. You are aware of reference to young unmarried women as 'Pajero'.

These are negative social-cultural attitudes which affect the position of women in society. Other Examples include: **bride - wealth or bride-price, dowry, wife-inheritance** etc. which must change to liberate women and society in total.





Aunt Jessica gave example after example, on how women are portrayed negatively even in advertisements. At that stage, a lot of the girls agreed with Aunt Jessica, saying they have always seen and heard such things but had never before understood their relationship to gender hierarchies and the subordination of women to men. She gave them yet another example of an advertisement that had been carried in one of the local TV Stations that said; "A cow, like wine and

women, can become better with age if well maintained." To make it worse these words had been uttered by a woman. The girls were shocked by these graphically illustrated examples.

After some time, the party gained momentum once again. Aunt Jessica, Akinyi and her friends went back to what they were doing, although many of Akinyi's friends had not understood most of the things that Aunt Jessica had talked about. They asked a lot of questions.

- What is gender?
- What is wrong with women doing their work as they have always done?
- Who can change the situation?
- Don't women write in newspapers? Why don't they write what they think is right?
- If women are used in advertisements and they like it, what is wrong? They do it any way. Is it out of ignorance? And aren't they paid to do it anyway?

These questions and many more disturbed Akinyi's friends, as they searched for answers.

### **Suggested answers**

There is need to establish a programme to sensitize journalism students about gender issues long before they qualify to become professional journalists.

Gender issues are now being perceived as an important element of human rights for women. *Time has therefore come when gender issues must be openly discussed through the press even though by and large, the mass media remain male dominated.*

Several days after the party, Akinyi and her friends Wanja and Koki, went to visit Aunt Jessica

**KOKI:** What was that word we learnt Akinyi? You know, now we have to be gender-sensitive.

**AUNT:** What other name are you looking for if you want to become journalists? A journalist is a journalist.

**AKINYI:** We don't just want to be journalists. We want to be **scribes**.

**AUNT:** You want to become writers. Then, it all depends on what you want to write about.

**KOKI:** That is why we came to see you. Last time, when we talked to you, you left us more confused.

**WANJA:** Aunt Jessica, you talked about a lot of things. But one thing that I didn't quite understand was gender. What is the meaning of gender?

**AUNT:** That's a good question because many people do not know the difference between gender and women. Briefly, gender is a concept that refers to the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male and female become the social categories of men and women.

Until recently, gender issues were not regarded by journalists, including female journalists, as important enough to warrant front page treatment in newspapers or to be used as first items in Television or Radio news bulletins.

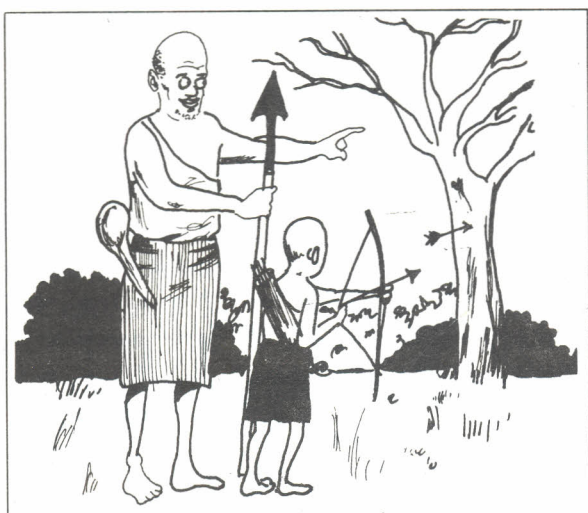
**For example:**

*It is impossible to see stories about women's poverty mainly because nobody seems to be concerned about their poverty.*

**AUNT:** All societies from the very simplest to the very complex assign some activities to women and others to men. This roles vary from one society to another. Every society defines its own roles for both men and women. That is why traditionally and culturally you will find that in some places the work of building a house is that of women while in another place it is the work of men.



*Traditionally, women in the Maasai community were the builders*



*Training for gender roles used to traditionally start at tender ages*



**WANJA:** Cooking, going to the market and washing are jobs done by women.

**AUNT:** Go on.

**KOKI:** Baby sitting too.

**AUNT:** And what about men? What do they do?

**AKINYI:** They are the decision makers, heads of households and breadwinners.

**AUNT:** Those are roles that are socially assigned. They are not God given or written any where; but they are understood within certain socio-cultural contexts. It is these roles that have been formulated to define masculinity and femininity. When you find a girl who likes playing games like football, what do you call her?

**KOKI:** A tomboy.

**AUNT:** That kind of girl is called a tomboy because, according to our traditional socio-cultural norms, it is boys that play games like football.





Cooking is traditionally seen as a woman's job

**AKINYI:** But nowadays, there are women who play football, just like there are women boxers. Social roles are changing.

*For example;*

*The Samburu woman who killed a lion single-handedly should have been highlighted by the print and electronic media. Media as a means of communication must be available to all, men and women, who want it and need to articulate their concerns to the general public.*

For a long time, men have been portrayed as stronger than women, and that is why most roles that require physical strength have been left to men.

**AUNT:** Give me other examples of jobs that are now done by both men and women?

**WANJA:** They are many, Capentry, Motor vehicle mechanic, construction, watchmen etc.



Men have always been portrayed as stronger than women, thus most roles that require physical strength are left to men



**AUNT:** These roles, however change and vary from community to community and are termed gender roles.

**WANJA:** In other words, gender issues are not just women issues!

**AUNT:** Yes, gender issues are issues that relate to the relationship between men and women (boys and girls.)

**Important:**

*The whole gender question is obviously tied to the status of women in society in general and the socialisation that journalists - both male and female - receive in the outside world.*

*The media have a major role to play as agents of social change. The power of the media to influence public thinking cannot be downplayed. This is especially so in terms of changing societal attitudes to women and providing the leadership and direction that will facilitate the improvement of women's status.*

**KOKI:** If then there are different gender roles in the society, what is wrong with women continuing to do what they have always done?

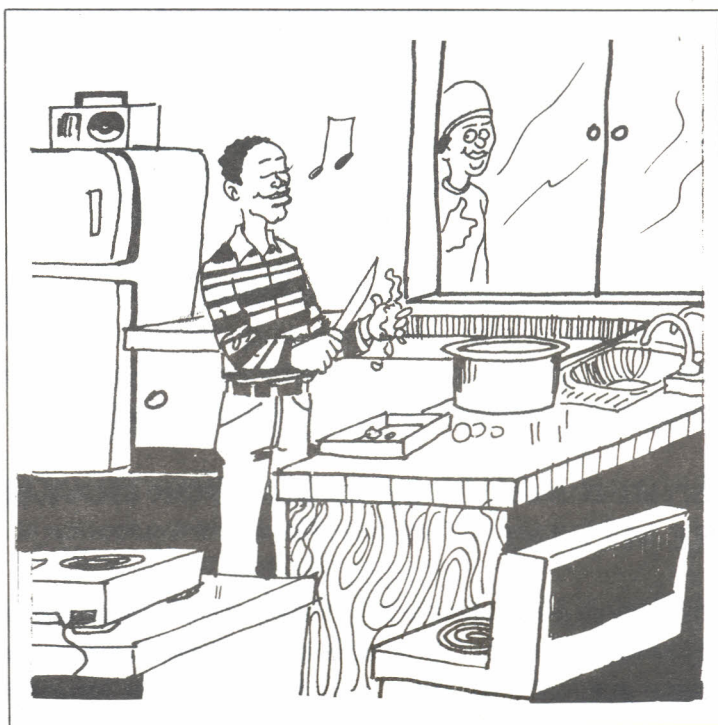
**AUNT:** The point is that these roles should not be fixed; they should vary from society to society and can change. But, what is most crucial is the attitude we have, which is clearly indicated by the use of language. Women are thought to be weak, cowardly and therefore people who should be protected, while men are the strong and brave, and the ones to maintain and support women. In some situations men are no longer the bread winners because things have changed. Nowadays, because of economic realities, both men and women work even when they are married. As a result, you cannot call the man the sole breadwinner. What is more, there are very many women single parents. These women, have become sole breadwinners and heads of their homes and households.

Clearly, we cannot continue to call or refer to women as weak, and as sex objects, as housewives and as people to be protected and maintained by men. Women can and do protect and maintain men and themselves.

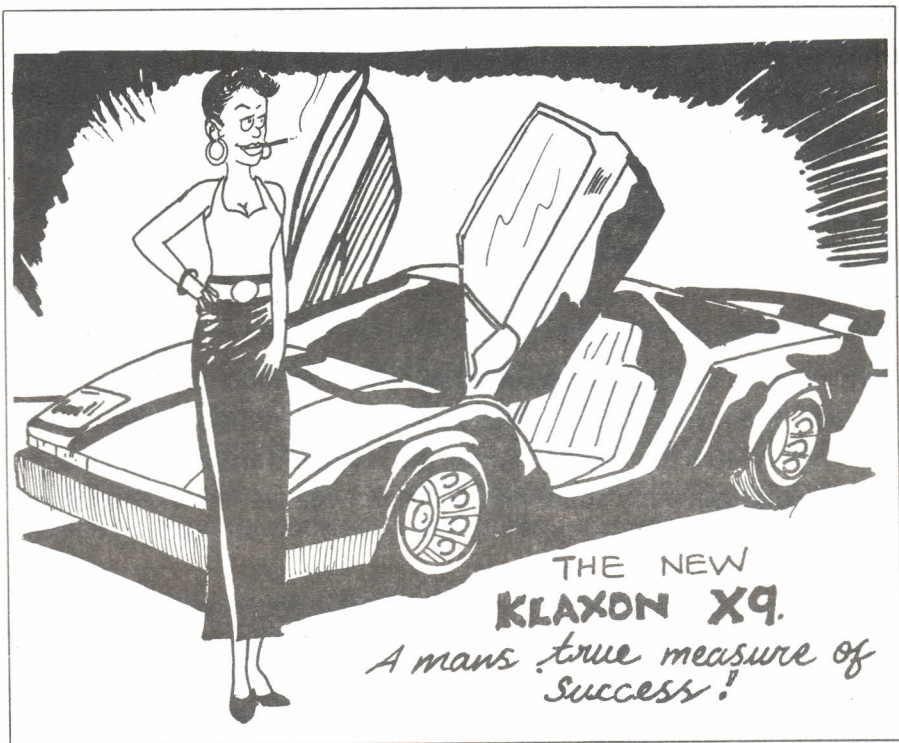
That is why words like watchman, craftsman, tea girl and hostess should not be used because any of the sexes can do these jobs.

### Media Sensitization

In order to incorporate gender concerns into their work, media agencies must provide their staff with training in gender sensitivity and the tools required to put gender equity into operation. Current experience indicates that this training is necessary as much for senior management as for the correspondents working in the provinces and districts.



*Roles are dynamic just as culture is. They can be swapped between sexes*



Training may take the form of a widely distributed gender training manual and written policy statements and housestyle manuals that lay down policy on the dos and dont's.

### *Who should take action?*

*The responsibility for integrating gender concerns into media activities and policy must be clearly assigned in order to institutionalize the process throughout an organisation. This should ideally be*

*Media agencies need to train staff on gender sensitivity if we are to eliminate such scenes in the press*



*undertaken at senior management level such as managing editor or training editor, where there is one, to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation.*

In order to ensure that policy is consistent and is translated into practice, members of staff and professional organisations such as the Kenya Union of journalists and the association of Media Women in Kenya must be involved in the development of gender policy statements.

**AUNT:** We also talked about advertisements. We cannot allow women to be portrayed as play things when advertising any product. When you put an advertisement for a job you cannot say "SALESMAN REQUIRED" because it eliminates/discriminates against women hopefuls. The advert suggests that it must be a man. There could be a more competent woman for the job than a man.

**WANJA:** But who is really going to change this situation?

**AUNT:** Both the people in the society and in the media should help by using balanced and gender sensitive language to help change the wrong attitudes that people have about each other.

### ***Point to remember***

*Media organisations' policies are governed by the commercial interest rather than the interests of the female gender or any other focus group for that matter.*

*They could however still SELL news and also play the important role of helping to shape people's attitudes through their mode of message delivery.*

## **GENDER ISSUES AND THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN LEADERS BY THE MEDIA.**

Akinyi, Wanja and Koki are now in high school. When they joined the school, they learnt of the existence of a journalism club. They registered as members immediately. Within a short period of time, they became actively involved in debates on various issues, and they contributed articles to the club's magazine. Their articles elicited a lot of debate. On the forefront was their ideals about gender issues. Their portrayal of women was seen in a realistic perspective. This deviated from the normal stereotypical ways of portraying the relationship between men and women.

They initiated a project of inviting journalists to come and give them talks on different issues. They first invited two journalists, a man and a woman. The two were to lead discussions on gender issues and how they are treated as news and how women are portrayed by the media. Before getting into the debate, the two journalists gave separate opening remarks.

### **MALE JOURNALIST**

#### **GENDER ISSUES AS NEWS**

The male journalist started by describing what could be considered as news. As much as there is not a particular concrete definition of news, there are certain basic concepts that define news. Some people would define news as something unusual, the extraordinary, the **unique happening**. Others will see news as **fresh or new information**, that adds something extra to what we know, or informs us of what we don't know.

#### ***Essential Information***

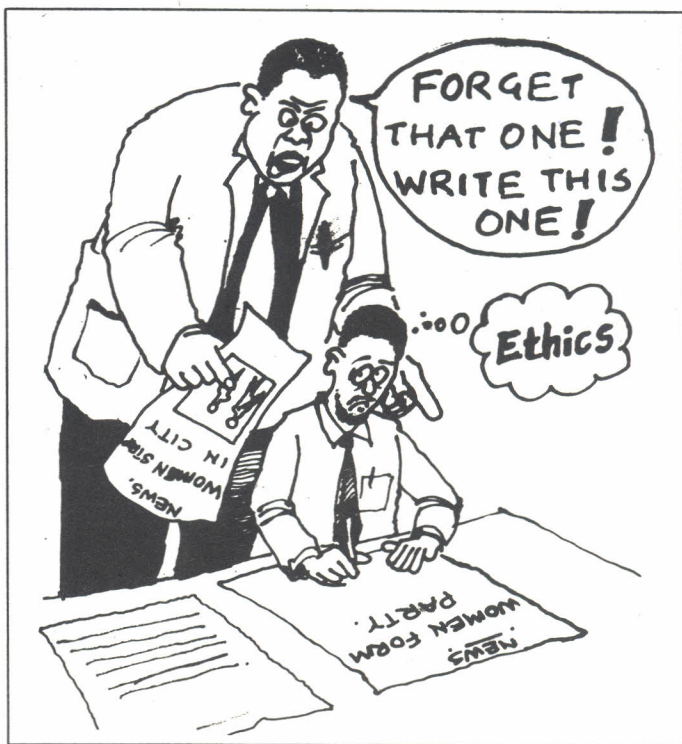
Who should determine what is news in modern day journalism?

*According to a UNESCO research, only a small minority of women in Kenya are considered to be newsmakers, and the exclusion of women from the "news" is of course related to the definition of news which needs to be re-examined if gender issues are to receive a fair coverage in Newspapers, TV and Radio Stations.*



He further explained that media organs should have a very clear understanding of who they want to address, noting that different media target different audiences. Some package their information purely for the youth, others aim to capture the top elite etc. Precisely because of that, what is seen as news is determined by what the target audience is seen to want. He concluded by saying that the most important consideration is who owns the medium and the level of control exercised by the owner on editorial decision making. It is this that guides the decision on the degree of prominence an event should be given.

He concluded by saying that **prominence** refers to what page an item should be placed and what position on that page it should occupy.



Media owners influence the editorial outcome. They too require gender-sensitivity training

**Point to Remember:**

*It is necessary for media agencies to develop policies that would enable women to balance their work and family life and take on management jobs without adversely affecting their families.*

**FEMALE JOURNALIST**

**GENDER DECISION MAKING IN THE MEDIA**

The female journalist pointed out the fact that news in Kenya is covered mainly by men, edited mainly by men, and is published in male owned and dominated media houses. She lamented that this was consistent with the general absence of women in key decision-making positions of most institutions. Despite women comprising more than 50% of the population, the society has treated them as second class citizens and very few are allowed to occupy leadership positions. She elaborated by saying that out of over 200 members of the Kenyan parliament, only seven were women by 1997, that Kenya got its first woman cabinet minister only recently. There are only three women permanent secretaries, and no woman vice-chancellor in any of the five public universities. There is no woman head of any parastatal institutions and neither is there any woman on the board of any of the banking institutions.

She concluded by accusing the media of being biased and of reinforcing negative stereotypes against women. She recommended that media organisations should be encouraged to appoint more women to key positions of influence using tools such as petitions and fronting names of potential candidates for leadership positions, especially in the case of boards elected at shareholders' meetings. This kind of work can only be carried out effectively by a lobby group dedicated to monitoring the status of women in national institutions and actively engaging in gender sensitization campaigns.

These opening remarks sparked off a protracted debate. But it was the ever inquisitive Akinyi who put the issues back on track.

**AKINYI:** Madam, you have said that there are few women leaders. This then makes it difficult for the media to project women leaders positively if they are hardly any. But what is the actual status of women in media decision-making and why is this so?



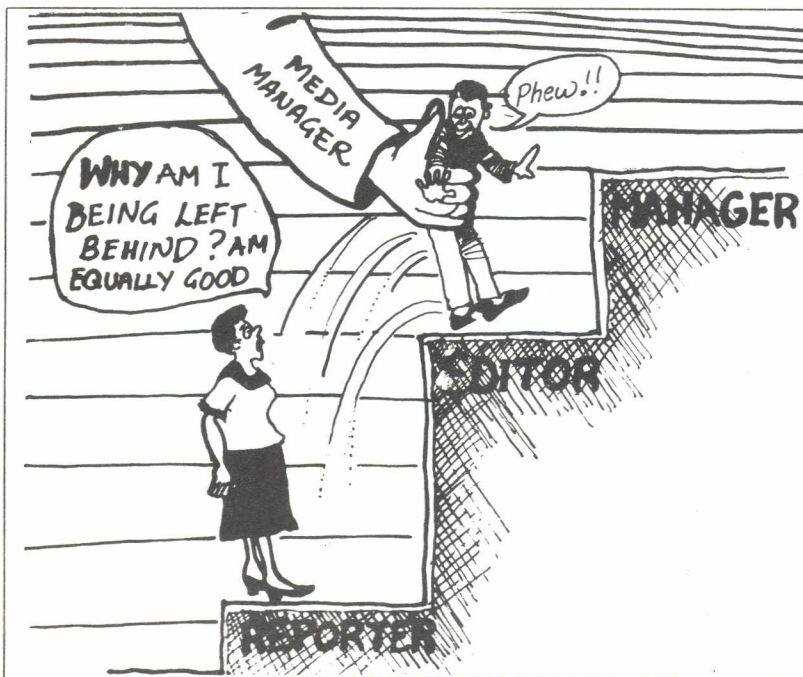
## FEMALE JOURNALIST

### *Women in the Media decision-making structures*

The media organisations surveyed indicate a general absence of women in the top echelons of power, including boards of directors and other positions of power and influence. The one woman who was on the board of directors of the country's major newspaper group recently retired, despite clear indications that there was need for greater representation. For example, a journalist who was a

*middle-level manager in a newspaper office in the mid-80s reports that she was denied a promotion on the grounds that she could not be called out for night duty because she was "somebody's wife" and this was used against her despite the fact that she had been acting in that position for quite a while and doing a good job.*

### *Facilitation of upward mobility of Women in the Media profession.*



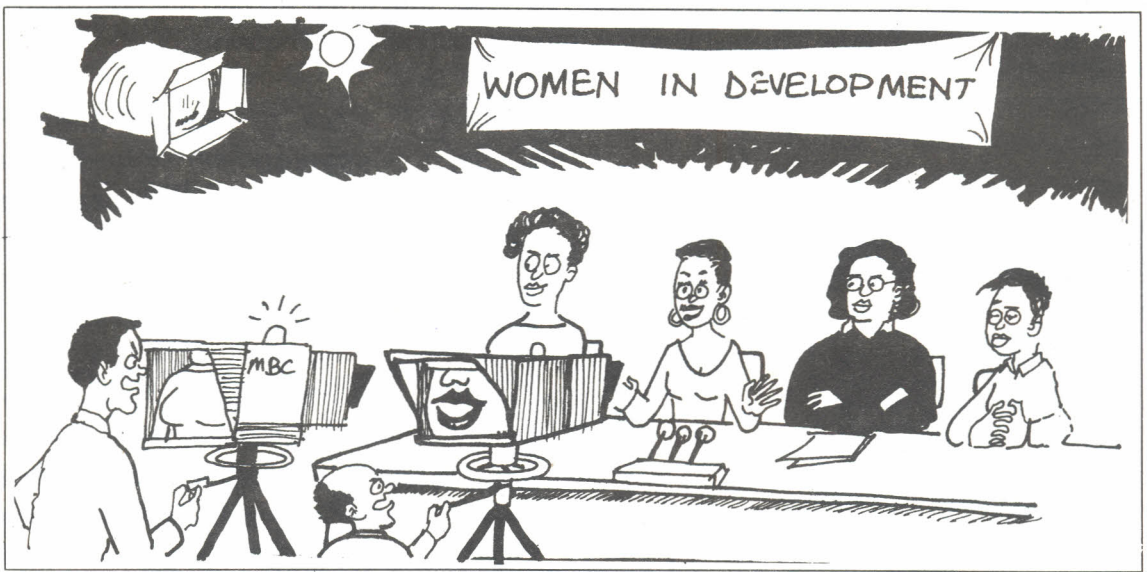
*Women who have the same capabilities as men should also be promoted*

*Apart from being fewer than men, women journalists who are already in employment are experiencing an extremely difficult task in trying to climb upwards into editorship or other important positions in the editorial departments of newspapers and other media organisations.*

*Apart from that, the morale of women journalists is constantly being weakened by the fact that few of them have the professional independence or autonomy of writing on subjects of their choice. There is therefore urgent need for a gender sensitive policy framework for the media.*

I would however, like to emphasise the leading roles that women play in the family, social and economic sectors of the country. In those spheres, women are silent leaders but they are not taken seriously. For example it is not strange to find a newspaper reporting about a women's meeting where very important issues were discussed that warrant comprehensive and serious coverage, just putting a large picture of some of the "beautiful" participants and a centimetre or so of write-up, as if looking good is what women's meetings are all about. In this way the media only reinforces the stereotypes that women are "things of beauty", who should not be taken seriously.





*The media concentrates more on women's beauty rather than the key issues at hand*

**Point to remember.**

*Journalists writing about economic issues or business stories hardly ever highlight the mistreatment of women in the economic activities of the country mainly because many of them are either **not gender sensitive** or they simply happen to be men writing about a male dominated society. Past mistakes, can only be corrected by sensitizing present business writers to gender issues.*

**MALE JOURNALIST:** I dispute the argument that women or gender issues are treated as second rate news material and are hardly ever treated as prime news in pages of newspapers and magazines. This is an easy way to find a scapegoat for society's weaknesses and biases.

**FEMALE JOURNALIST:** The media is made by society to serve that society and the various consumers and for that reason the media should not perpetuate these stereotypes but should work consciously to destroy them.

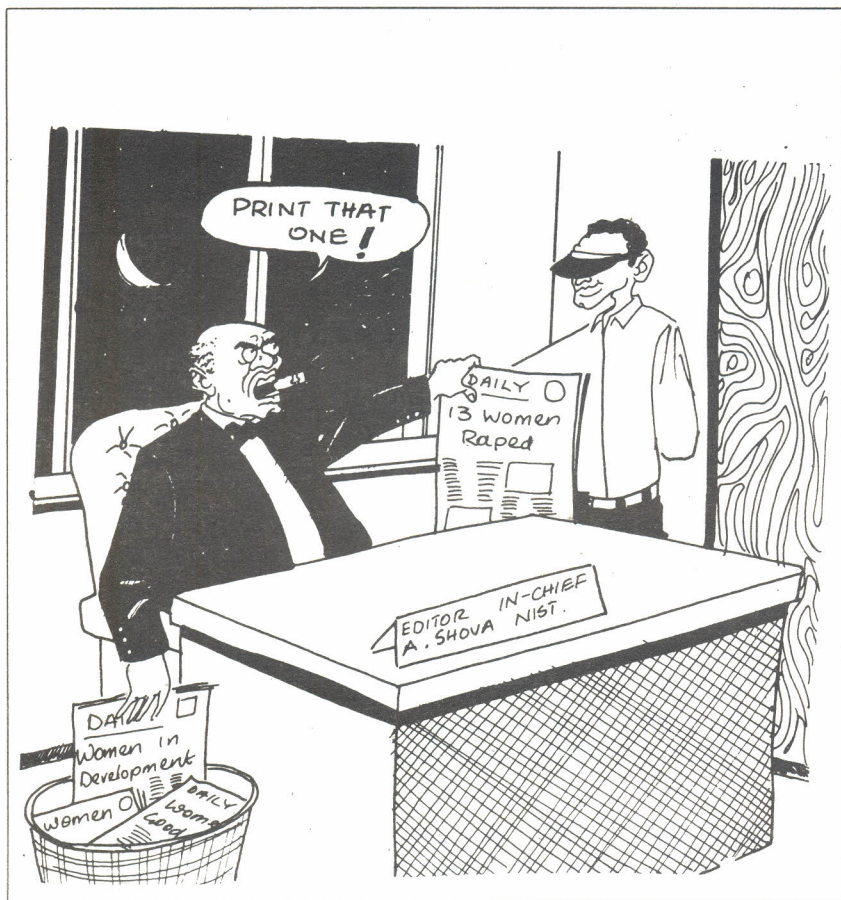
*Furthermore, prevailing policies and standards are not based on a systematic approach to redressing the gender imbalances. They are short on focus and depth and point to a need to consolidate current positive practices and develop formal, wide-ranging gender policies covering portrayal of women in news, advertisements, photography and language.*

A good example of the negative media portrayal of women was the Winnie and Mandela divorce case, where throughout, Winnie was constantly referred to as **President Mandela's estranged wife**, but President Mandela was never referred to as **Winnie's estranged husband**. This example, shows the kind of pressure women in the limelight and women leaders are always under in order to fit into the stereotypes society has created for them. It portrays the wife as the guilty party even when this is not the case.

**MALE JOURNALIST:** There is the popular accusation that gender issues become news when women are raped, beaten, treated badly or unfairly. It is true that this is rarely reported as news (unless it is a crime report) but as a report or court proceedings against the accused, almost always a man. But if similar experiences by men are rarely reported, it is not because they do not happen or editors deliberately mask them, but because society frowns on weak men and they prefer to be kept out of the public domain.



**FEMALE JOURNALIST:** Even by your examples, you notice that when women are portrayed in the media it is mainly when they are victims or delinquents.



Lack of regular and proper coverage on violence against women in Kenya is caused by the absence of women journalists in decision-making positions in newspapers.

Paradoxically, lack of gender sensitivity among most Kenyan journalists has been in part caused by the subjugation of female journalists to work on women's pages spending precious time chasing stories of very little benefit to women leaders.

But this is not just a uniquely Kenyan issue. The leading newspapers in the world do not treat women or gender issues differently from men and the fact that more women are in the news is purely a result of more women being involved in events which generate news. Despite this, in

*Women are portrayed in the media only when they are victims of gender violence*

terms of quantity, men or men-oriented activities still dominate the news pages of newspapers across the world.

The undeniable fact is that this is a result of the media being a male-dominated field. The media being male-dominated therefore serves the interest of a small male elite. It effectively excludes the voices of women, Children and even majority of men. These marginalised groups then become invisible and have no voice. The media ends up being for the rich and powerful men.

And because the journalism rule of "dog bites man is not news" but "man bites dog is news", women leaders like their male counterparts receive coverage in the print media only if they do or say something "newsworthy".



*Women get very little media coverage*





Women are only covered in the media when they do something "newsworthy"

the politics of which party you belong to. And for that matter women opposition leaders are denied a medium through which they can reach the majority of women in the rural areas, whose only source of mass media news is usually via radio.

**MALE JOURNALIST:** I do not want to downplay the effect of bias and gender insensitivity which may occasionally play a part in the negative depiction of women through for instance, use and selection of pictures, cartoons etc. These weaknesses can best be tackled through direct intervention of the kind that this meeting hopes to facilitate.

**FEMALE JOURNALIST:** One of the reasons, that has resulted to women having a raw deal in the media is that there are not enough women in decision making positions in the media.

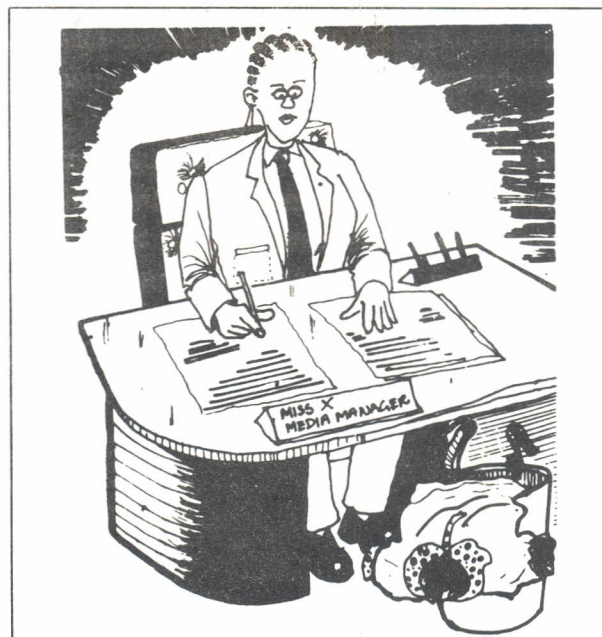
**MALE JOURNALIST:** But ultimately, even a gender sensitive editor must select and present news which can sell. If women therefore want more prominence, the challenge is for them to force society to recognise them.

**FEMALE JOURNALIST:** There is considerable evidence that an increasing number of women employed in the media does not of itself translate into qualitative differences in programming, or a radically altered news agenda of priorities. All in all women's struggle for self development and autonomy is linked to freedom to express themselves and this means having more control and access to means of communication.

**MALE JOURNALIST:** I quite agree with you but my opinion is that contrary to popular opinion, the media does not set the agenda, it can only accentuate the attention that society applies to an issue.

*Media content, whether its news, feature articles, editorials or personal columns, is dictated by events, the forces at play in society, its make-up and the overriding needs of its people.*

**FEMALE JOURNALIST:** My opinion is that the media can be used to focus attention or to persuade a particular person to carry out his or her plans. Example, the state-owned electronic media (Television and Radio). What matters is the



Women too need to be sensitised. Cases exist where women in top echelons of power just act like men



Women must struggle to ensure that the concerns of the female gender are integrated into the entire media activities and are made a routine concern of all media staff.

*In this context, it is important to educate women on the importance of media coverage, how to approach the media personnel and the need to make their views known to the rest of the public through proper media coverage. In Kenya, the female gender must struggle to get their "story" told, by they themselves setting an agenda for the media.*

### **BACK TO AKINYI AND OTHER JOURNALIST STUDENTS....**

The more the debate continued, the more exciting it became. But after a while, the students of the journalism club were divided into groups so that they could write down what they understood by some of the issues that affect the projection of women by the media.

At the end of the meeting, what the groups had written was discussed and the most important points written down, for record and reference.

#### **Summary of important points: Issues affecting projection of women by the media**

- Editor's choice of stories
- The media's role in shaping societal attitudes about men and women, and its bias in favour of men.
- Role of media in shaping and re-shaping gender roles. What is the role of the Media in society - to inform educate and entertain?
- Role of Media in empowering women
- Skewed power relations between men and women.
- Reinforcement of existing gender stereotypes by the media.
- Media reduces women to mere bodies.
- Role of advertising in oppressing women in the media, and how it reduces women to social objects.
- Socialization and gender sensitivity
- Use of media women as tools to cover women's issues.
- General lack of editorial policy for gender sensitive reporting.

## **WORKING TOWARDS A GENDER SENSITIVE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA**

### **IN A NUTSHELL**

*Women must work out strategies for more positive portrayal and coverage of gender issues in the media.*

One strategy is to form community information centres where women can sit and listen to gender sensitive radio, television or video taped programmes.<sup>1</sup> This would help to generate new ideas among themselves.

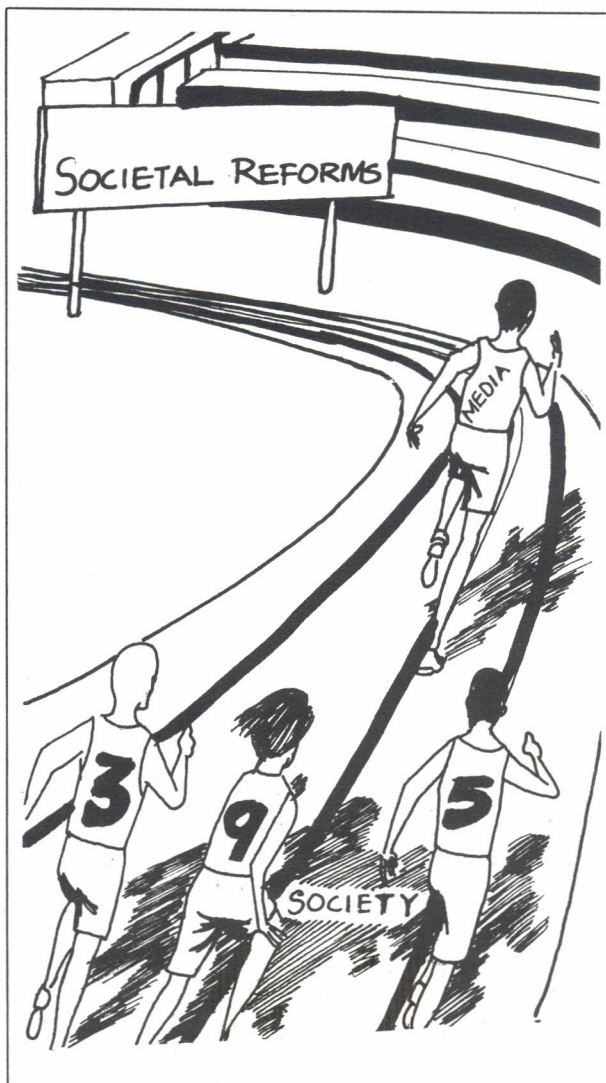
Another strategy is to ensure that the concerns of the female gender are incorporated and integrated into the mainstream media and/or set up women's **alternative media**

*A woman's alternative media will provide women with an opportunity to define their own identities through song, dance etc. and document their experiences and stories in their own words on how women have been denied their human rights.*

By now the students were most eager to start a school magazine. Akinyi, Koki and Wanja volunteered to attempt editing the magazine. But a big question loomed: How and where shall they start? Since they were agreed that the school magazine would be an example in trying to cover gender issues, they had to be careful in their plan. In this regard, when they met for the first time they had a caution from their teacher.

**TEACHER:** Now that you are set to begin work on the magazine and now that we are agreed that it must be a gender sensitive magazine, there are a number of things you need to bear in mind before moving any further. These include:

- That the media wields the single-most important influence as a social information disseminator as a result of which, the public largely depends on it for news and education on many issues, of which, the gender question is one.
- That the struggle for gender rights and autonomy is linked to the freedom to express themselves and this necessitates the need to have more control and access to means of communication.
- That the media therefore has a major role to play in shaping public opinion and attitudes to gender issues generally and women's roles and statuses in particular.
- That the proposed women's school magazine must underscore that gender is not about one's physical biological form, but it is about the social and cultural perceptions and interpretations of masculine and feminine traits and roles.
- That while both male and female are socialized to accept assigned gender roles, the media has the role of educating about the shortcomings of such role-play.



*The media sets the pace of society in terms of opinions and attitudes*

## NEWS GATHERING

### Point to Remember:

*News gathering is a selective process through which the media seeks out news with a view to disseminating it to news consumers. The process involves both new's consumer and news gatherer - the news reporter or correspondent and news processes and editor - each of who has a measure of influence over what is eventually published.*

**TEACHER:** Bearing the above principles in mind, the next stage is to undertake some research which we will term news gathering and some analysis and presentation which we will term **news processing**.



For this purpose, we will split into three groups of five persons each. Akinyi, Koki and Wanja as joint editors of the proposed school magazine, will lead the respective groups. With the kind of magazine we want to Group One will look into the area of **News gathering**, and will report back to us on the "hows" of news gathering. The second group should research on news presentation and group three should handle the **Processing** of the issues that will be in the magazine. The groups were given one week to complete their respective assignment.

The following week, when the journalist club met, the "home-work" they had been given had already been done.

## **GROUP I**

### **NEWS GATHERING: By Akinyi**

**AKINYI:** We shall try to discuss the most important aspects of news gathering.  
The most important aspects of news gathering identified were:

- News gathering is a selective process through which the media seeks out news with a view to disseminating it to news consumers.
- The reader is largely a passive participant while the reporter is the active participant.
- It is the individual reporter who influences what is eventually processed as news.
- News gathering is the most basic and fundamental issue in media work because it is the starting point of what is eventually written as a news report.
- In specialized areas of news coverage like in the area of gender coverage, news gathering must be complemented by gender sensitive attitudes and perceptions which help project positive values.
- A reporter gathering news on gender issues must be able to source through the information at hand and make a decision over what aspects to highlight and which ones to downplay.
- However, the house rules of specific media houses have a strong influence in determining how a reporter will go about gathering news. The reporter is therefore influenced by what fits within the news policy of the specific media houses.

After the summary presentations the members of the club had a long discussion on these issues and it was agreed that the findings indicated that in Kenya, the processing of news on gender ensure that, women hardly feature in the front pages or positions the little gender coverage often leaves predominantly distorted images, making it difficult for the woman to find her rightful place and role in the society.

**TEACHER:** From your summary and discussions, it is obvious that a conscious step must be taken in news gathering and move away from this traditional perception of news and acknowledge development issues as being capable of generating news. This is one way pushing the gender agenda in terms of a news gathering process that is gender sensitive.

## **GROUP II - PRESENTATION OF NEWS: By Wanja**

**WANJA:** The following are the findings of Group II on Presentation of News.

Presentation influences the level and degree of importance attached by news readers on issues under coverage. The mode of presentation can be beneficial if it is objective and can also be cheapening and reduce the importance of a specific subject.

Presentation will include placing of a new story, placing of pictures in relation to the message conveyed by the visual image and even the headings of stories and captions of pictures e.g. pictures can help perpetuate gender stereotypes and confine women to the “prisons” of their traditional roles if not used in an appropriate manner. That would re-inforce a stereotype about women.

**GROUP II MEMBER:** Like a photograph that shows a Family coming back from a Holiday and in the picture a woman is carrying a child on her back, then she has luggage on her head and on her hands, then next to her is a man walking without anything or maybe just a newspaper in his hands or walking stick.

**TEACHER:** So what kind of image do you get from that picture?

**GROUP MEMBER:** That the woman is the family donkey.

**TEACHER:** And since there would still be such real situations, if you were to carry that picture in your paper how would you deal with it?

**ANOTHER GROUP MEMBER:** I would put a caption which would help to provoke the reader to see the inequity in such an arrangement.

**WANJA:** Thank you. We also notice that, in the media most images of women are those that confine women to their traditional roles like cooking, knitting etc. And therefore they present women issues as petty issues and, not of policy importance and debate.

**TEACHER:** That is why even with the existence of Women pages or Female Style, the print media have not helped matters much, as the existence of these pages tend to restrict and reduce and marginalise women issues.

I will suggest that to complement the work of these pages, there is need to establish an exclusive women’s **news and features agency**.

This would help create a broad gender consciousness within media houses, and hence broader and improve the quality of coverage of gender issues.



*The print media should use scenes such as these to educate the public on the gender imbalances and injustices*

### GROUP III

#### PROCESSING OF NEWS: by Koki

**KOKI:** When we were trying to find out what processing is, we met a local journalist who works as a sub-editor. We had a discussion with him on this topic. From this interview and further research of Group II, we came up with the following in regard to the processing of news:

- News processing is done by editors and sub-editors who edit and place stories in appropriate pages and spaces.
- It is the editors and sub-editors who shape stories written by reporters.
- It is also their work to allocate photo captions to photographs and to select headline for stories.





*News editors need a lot of sensitization because they are the ones who finally determine what is printed*

Education in gender sensitivity is the only way by which they can make conscious and deliberate effort towards ensuring that ultimately only gender sensitive news make their way out of the production line. Editors and sub-editors therefore need to be gender sensitized in the use and choice of language and topical issues and events.

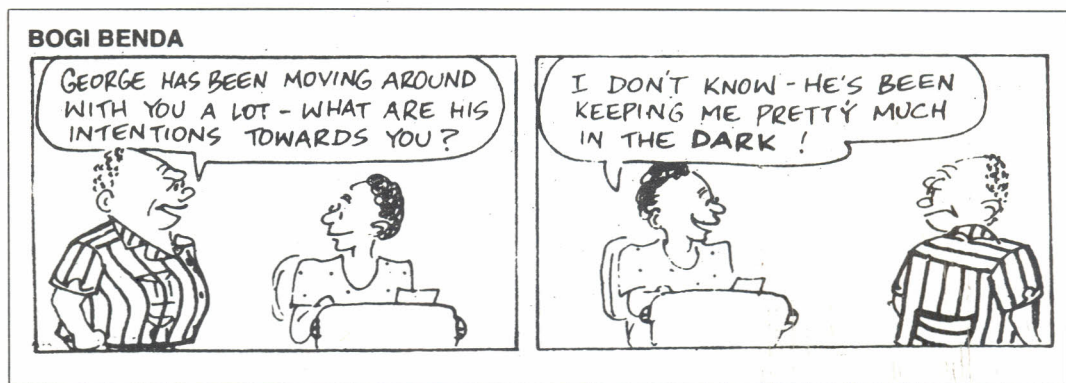
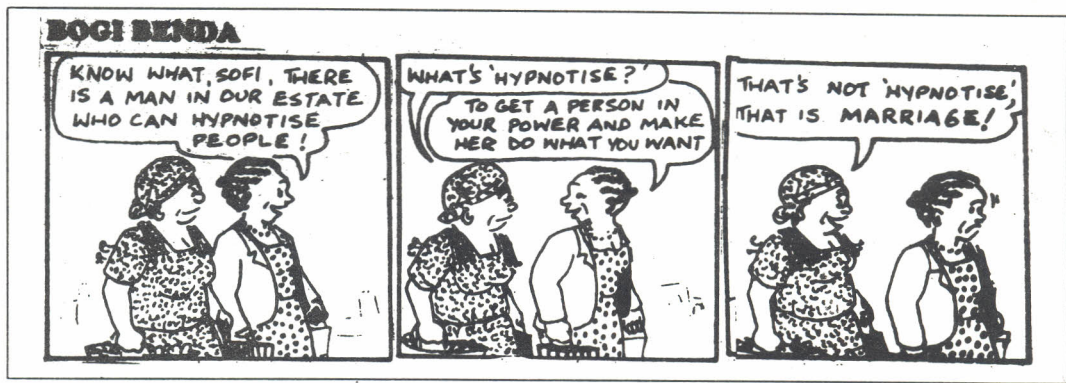
**TEACHER:** Can one of you give an example of headlines that have appeared on local newspapers that are not gender sensitive?

**GROUP III MEMBERS:** Take for example this **“Woman killed, 4 injured by terror gang”**.

This gives the impression that the woman is not a person like the other four. A more gender sensitive caption could have read—— **“1 killed, 4 injured by terror gang”**.

**ANOTHER MEMBER:** Yet another example:... **“Fat woman leads gang”** ..... This was after a raid in a bank by robbers. If the media was gender sensitive, it would not have been necessary to describe the size of the woman. Otherwise, how come men are not described by reference to their physique? How come, for example, you never read a caption titled **“thin man steals a thousand bob”**, so the description of fat is unfair to the woman.

**ANOTHER GROUP MEMBER:** Furthermore, in popular cartoon strips as **Eb and Flo**, **Bongoman** and even **Bogi Benda**, mostly show women as people who entirely depend on men. They are always portrayed as wife, mother, mistress, waiter etc. But not always. Take these examples in the following illustrations.



**TEACHER:** Since we are still interested in producing a school magazine that is gender sensitive, I still want to give more work - of stories you can write anytime. Our next assignment will therefore be on the **portrayal of women in cartoons and graphics in the print media**. All I want you to do is to study cartoons in the newspapers and identify any negative portrayal of women. When we meet again we shall study cartoons. In other words, read and analyse visual presentations in the media with gender sensitive lenses. Discuss them and suggest alternatives.

*A week later.....*

**VISUAL MEDIA PRESENTATION OF GENDER ISSUES**

The following week the classroom where the journalism club was meeting looked like a cartoon gallery. The manila paper with cartoons stuck on were on all walls with running commentaries. The students had put their own comments on the gender insensitivity of the cartoons. The commentary ran something like this:



- Women as gossips
- Women as weaklings
- Women as tea-makers
- Women as men's property, slaves, sex objects
- Women as beasts of burden



Women as sex objects



Women as gossipers

- TEACHER:** Please hang these information on the school notice board for all students to read. Now from your presentation and analysis, what main thing do you notice with the cartoonists?
- STUDENT:** None of these regular cartoonist is a woman.
- TEACHER:** True. Similarly, these popular cartoons are certainly not sensitive to gender issues. But, would women cartoonists make a difference in the portrayal of women in the media?
- STUDENT 1:** Yes.
- STUDENT 2:** No. I don't think it is obvious. There are some women who are gender insensitive when it comes to negative issues. We have read these cartoons without noticing their bias, until the teacher told us to look at them carefully.
- TEACHER:** So, your first recommendation is to have women cartoonists, and second that any cartoonist, man or woman should be gender sensitive in the portrayal of both men and women. Where are these women cartoonists?
- STUDENT 1:** There is need to train women to become cartoonists. Women artists should be encouraged to run cartoon strips.
- TEACHER:** Where shall we get a woman cartoonist for the purpose of our magazine where shall we get a cartoonist if we need one?
- AKINYI:** I shall recruit a friend of mine in the arts class. She indicated to me that she could draw cartoons for the magazine once was ready for publications.
- TEACHER:** Good Akinyi, but can you request her to come to our meetings? We want all contributors to be gender sensitive. She understand our agenda for the magazine from the beginning.
- AKINYI:** I will request her to come to our next meeting.
- TEACHER:** From now onwards, it will be important to complain to our local newspapers everytime you see a gender insensitive report, headline or cartoon in the newspapers.
- STUDENT 2:** Yes, but how do we do it?
- TEACHER:** You can complain by writing to the editor in form of a letter to the editor.
- STUDENT:** Yes, it is important to read newspapers carefully and to voice our concern every time we see those biased reporting.
- TEACHER:** Thank you for your ideas on gender sensitization. Spread the message on gender awareness in your communities and among your colleagues.

## FEMALE GENDER SETTING AN AGENDA FOR THE MEDIA

### **Point to Remember:**

*Women must prevail upon the media to mainstream their concerns. Mainstreaming the female gender would give women a voice and visibility in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination of it by the media.*

***In other words....***

*The female gender must endeavour to transform the media perception on what makes news or who should make news. Prevalent news values define women and women's problems and concerns as unnewsworthy.*

After a series of meetings, students felt confident that they were ready to begin writing stories for the school magazine. They set a time for themselves to go and gather stories for publication. They were all eager to see how the new gender sensitive school magazine would look.

What gave them impetus and motivation was the promise that if the first copy was good, then it would be sent to other schools to be used as a model to create gender sensitivity and awareness among students and teachers.

The most important issue was an in-house meeting of the editors to agree on a number of issues. A meeting of the editors (Akinyi, Koki and Wanja) was arranged and of course, the teacher was in attendance.

**TEACHER:** What progress have you made on the production of the school magazine? The focus for this particular issue of the school magazine should be on how women can set an agenda for the media. I must also mention that the school head has agreed not only to send the magazine to other schools but also to other media houses, and institutions to popularize the concern for gender sensitization and awareness in the country.

**AKINYI:** Yes, but that is quite a big challenge to us!

**KOKI:** I'm confident we can overcome the challenge.

**TEACHER:** Good. Now, how can women set an agenda for the media?

**AKINYI:** That is a very interesting question. Recently I had a discussion with my journalist Aunt Jessica. We talked about that same topic and I have some suggestions to make. Traditionally, newsmakers are supposed to set the media agenda, since they are the ones who present the news. But, this trend must be changed because women are in the majority in this country and therefore they must set the agenda for the media.

**WANJA:** I agree. If they are to do things which affect the public, either for better or worse, then they are bound to be in the media. The women should do things that are considered relevant, socially, economically, politically or even religiously significant to be able to set the agenda for the media.



*Women must make themselves accessible to the media. They should seek the media if they are to be adequately covered*



**TEACHER:** Are there women you know who have made significant contributions and achievements to the public at large and have been recognized?

**KOKI:** Yes, I can quickly think of professor Wangari Maathai of the Greenbelt Movement.

**TEACHER:** Thank you. Think of how such a respected woman has been able to do her work to attract media coverage. How have women like her set an agenda for the media? They have done so in the following ways:

- **Topical issues:** to focus on an issue that many people have taken for granted and actively advocating for or against that issue. e.g Linking the environmental issue with gender and human rights.
- **Tactic of presentation:**
  - Being extremely consistent about these issues.
  - Making press statements are simple but sensible and emotional but not excessive, thus making an impact both on the editors and the public at large.
- **Consistency, non-flamboyant and single minded style,** has made people to re-think on the issues they have focused on.
- **Credible approach:** Several factors have contributed to their approach:
  - taking a grassroots approach, which is different from other gender activists who have often been accused of being elitist.
  - Dealing with issues on the spot, by being at the place where the issue is happening.
  - Sense of selflessness.

All these are conscious efforts to set an agenda for the media.

**AKINYI:** But it is also true that there are a lot of other women who have been doing the same, but have been given a blackout by the media. The problem is that many women gender activists are sporadic in their issuing of statements. They lack consistency.

**KOKI:** And what is more, we have talked of media houses that are not gender sensitive. They are also male dominated.

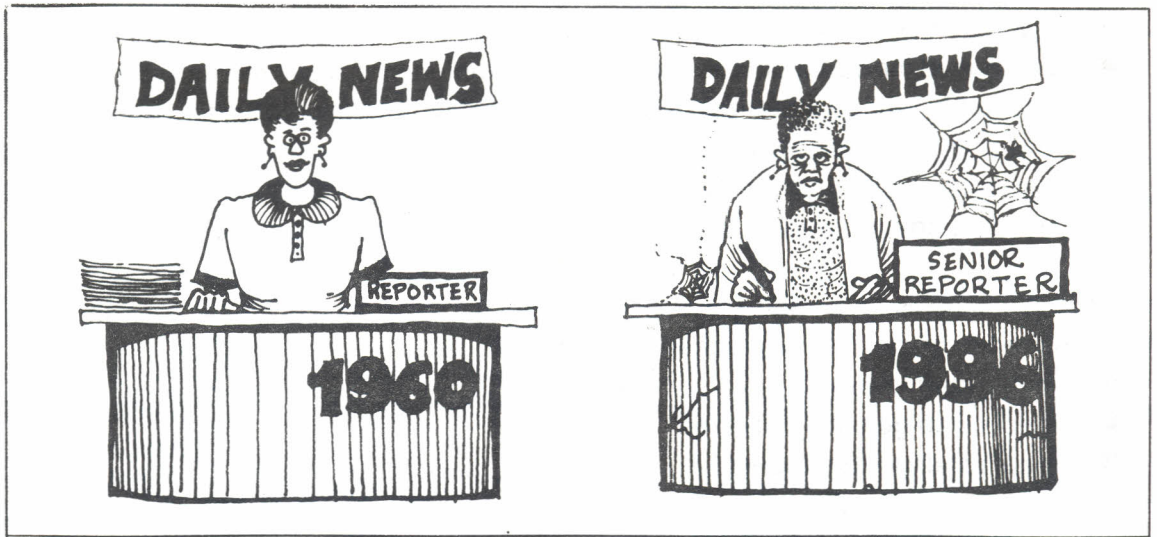
**TEACHER:** I agree with you, however, if women were in decision making positions like Editors-in-Chief, Managing Editors or even senior sub-editors we could challenge them to “set an agenda” for the media. But women are not in any of these key media positions.

Aunt Jessica was in attendance at our next meeting. The main agenda was to look into ways that women could prevail upon the media to mainstream their concerns.

**AUNT:** Just for purposes of clarification could you elaborate on mainstreaming the gender agenda for the media.

**TEACHER:** Indeed, mainstreaming the female gender, seeks to give women a voice and visibility in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination of it by the media. What we are saying is that it is a fact that women are not given enough (equal to the male gender) space to voice their concerns or to ensure that their invisibility is even put in the open as a problem.

**AUNT:** I think media managers should give serious thought to establishing an Affirmative Action programme for media women which not only recognise the various constraints that women (with their multiple roles) face but which also encourage women to be prepared to take larger, managerial roles. In the media that encouragement might take the form of making more training courses available to media women or promoting them more quickly, especially when their skills are patently clear.



*Women should be promoted more quickly than is the case now*

- KOKI:** We know that it has not been a media habit to send reporters to cover women's activities and functions, what do you think could be done in such a situation?
- AUNT:** Women groups, both urban and rural should be encouraged to use the media. They must approach editors and newsroom managers to demand for coverage of their functions.
- KOKI:** How can women be encouraged to use media houses?
- AUNT:** One strategy could be to develop a manual to provide guidelines for women on how to work with the media. The manual should also provide a methodology of how non-media women can reach the media.
- AKINYI:** What about rural illiterate women, who cannot read a manual?
- AUNT:** One strategy is to form community information centres where women can sit and listen to radio, watch television or video tapes. If this happens and it reaches women in rural and urban areas in large numbers, then, women will have a women's mass movement in this country.
- TEACHER:** In other words, women must find a forum to correct this falsified and distorted information about their images.
- WANJA:** Is it necessary, that for women to set the agenda for the media, more people must be involved; more than just women journalist, and if so, who else would be involved?
- AUNT:** We must find a way to pressurise media houses to give female gender related assignments to journalists who are more responsive to women's interests and concerns. It is important to remember that, while the media does not determine the way people think about public issues, they do set the stage for discussion on what people will talk or debate about. The mass media have blocked the most elaborate and contemporary debates and discussions on women's issues by either giving them a partial coverage or completely ignoring them. As a result, the general public (including some women) have remained ignorant on issues affecting women and how they have come about.
- AKINYI:** I feel that some issues which affect women are too serious to be left entirely in the hands of female journalists in the mainstream media. Can you tell us briefly what other methods could be used to correct this situation?
- AUNT:** There are several strategies that can be employed:



1) To set up women's **alternative media**

- alternative media would provide space for women to discuss their concerns and to offer support to other women and to seek comments from their readers.
- The alternative media will give women the capacity to include contents which are not commonly found in the mainstream print media like abortion, sexuality, women's health, violence against women and news of the women's movement.

2) To establish mechanisms for diffusing responsibility for the integration of the female gender concerns into mainstream media. These mechanisms include:

- media staff training
- media staff gender guidelines
- media staff gender tool kit.

3) Through activism - achieved through the formation of a lobby group of women journalists, which should:

- have a strong mobilizing capacity.
- Respond to media sexist portrayal of women in advertisements.
- Prevail upon media managers to withdraw and apologise whenever they carry any negative reporting on women.



*Women make news too*

4) To recruit and increase women working in the mainstream media organisations who are gender sensitive.

These are some of the many available methods that can be used in correcting the situation. What role do you plan to play?

**AKINYI:** We want to provide an alternative media through our little school magazine.

**AUNT:** That's a good beginning, it will provide a demonstration effect for the mainstream media.

During the next school holiday, Akinyi, Koki and Wanja edited all the articles for the school magazine. They had given it a very symbolic name: **THE ALTERNATIVE VOICE**.

**The Alternative Voice**, became the talk of schools in the region. Some dismissed it as mere propaganda but others realized it's potential. It is this copy that inspired Aunt Jessica and her other media women professional colleagues to sit and make a summary of issues related to gender sensitization of the media in a bid to try and formulate a media gender policy framework. This, they were to send to the editors of **The Alternative Voice** to encourage and strengthen their efforts and ideas.

## GENDER ISSUES IN THE MEDIA: PROVIDING A POLICY FRAMEWORK

The following are some of the issues that the cited media women identified as a good basis for formulating a gender sensitive policy framework for the media:

### ■ Human Rights for Women

Gender issues are now being perceived as an important element of human rights for women. Men can no longer be allowed to continue to succeed economically, politically and socially at the expense of women who are left far too behind.

### ■ Poverty among Women

Though they are the most hard working group, women in Kenya cannot be said to be given a fair opportunity to either earn decent incomes or own property.

Apart from being denied a fair opportunity to make a good income for themselves, they also happen not to be given a fair chance to take part in making important economic decisions.

In the media, past mistakes can be corrected by sensitizing present business writers to gender issues or better still making sure that women journalists hold important positions in business sections of editorial departments.

### ■ Violence Against Women

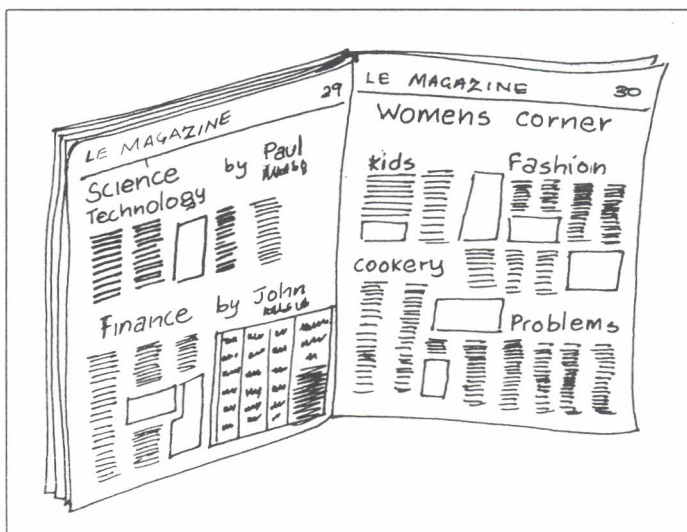
Violence against women is an important issue among many subjects which should occupy more prominent positions in our newspaper pages as well as prime time of our TV and radio programmes.

e.g.

- forced female genital mutilation,
- forced early marriages
- lack of legal awareness among women victimised by men
- health issues which endanger women's lives like illegal abortions.
- laws being used to subordinate women etc.

### ■ The Traditional Women's Page

One of the biggest problems for women journalists - and the cause of lack of adequate gender sensitivity among most Kenyan journalists - has been,





paradoxically caused , by the so-called women's pages which have been responsible for the subjugation of female journalist at work and the reason for chasing stories of very little benefit to women readers e.g. beauty and hair style, cookery, child care, latest shoe fashions etc.

### ■ Negative Media Treatment of Women

Women in Kenya mostly make news as wives, mothers or daughters of men already in news.

Misuse of women as "baits" through which various products are sold. The woman is viewed as good "good" if she is characterized by dependence, ineffectuality, humility and lack of initiative. And she is normally "bad" if she is a career driven and if she is independent and shows a bit of aggressiveness.



*Women should be given serious issues to handle too*



*Women are used as "baits" in adverts to sell products*

## CHECKLIST FOR A GENDER SENSITIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR THE MEDIA.

### I. Developing a Gender-Sensitive Policy

- An assessment of the problem
- Description of the values, principles and vision guiding the policy
- System for applying policy throughout the organisation
- Clear goal, strategies and guidelines for implementation

### II. Mainstreaming gender Equity

- Equal opportunities for participation, leadership, access to benefits and control over decision-making
- Women-specific or mainstream?
- Monitoring and evaluation

### III . Gender Integration Training

- What is gender sensitivity?
- Tools for putting gender equity into operation
- How do we convey the message?

### IV. Support from Senior Management

- Leadership from the powers-that-be
- Women needs to be present at all levels of management
- Powerful women can make a difference

### V. Gender Equity in Internal Management

- Increasing women's access to status, power and decision-making
- Strategies for recruiting, retaining and promoting women
- Equal opportunity practices
- Family-friendly policies
- Training and career development



In the foregoing discussions, many important issues related to gender and the media have been raised and analysed. At this concluding point, it is therefore imperative to summarise some of the pertinent recommendations that recur in this volume for policy change and action:

- Gender sensitization at all levels of media management and work is absolutely necessary. Everyone, from the media owners to the rural reporter, should be sensitized to appreciate the importance of gender sensitive and gender balanced news coverage and reporting. Training programmes need to be put in place for this purpose.
- The policy frameworks and decision-making structures of media houses should be comprehensively reviewed to reflect the principle of gender equity and justice in the hiring and promotion practices, as well as create an enabling environment for both men and women taking into account the existing gender imbalances in the division of labour and access to resources and opportunities.
- The code of conduct of the Kenya Union of Journalists needs to be comprehensively gender sensitized.
- There is need to revitalise and transform into an effective lobby, the Media Women's Association of Kenya.
- There is need to form an alternative lobby group, mandated to act as a watchdog and forum for taking media action on all gender related issues.
- The possibility forming an alternative feminist/gender sensitive press, as a tool for gender sensitization should also be explored.
- Features and news stories should be regularly written by the mainstream print media on such pertinent gender issues as: Affirmative action, phenomena of female headed households, the harassed women in the urban informal sector and various aspects of the Beijing Platforms of Action.

The above recommendations are in line and compare well with those made at the NCSW July 1996, preparatory **Gender Sensitization of the Media Workshop**.

The following recommendations were made after the July 1996, two-day workshop:

- Media houses should develop and implement gender responsive editorial, recruitment and promotion policies.
- Men and women media practitioners, recognising that gender issues are societal, and not women's issues, should take practical corrective measures that mainstream gender issues in the overall media policy structures and programmes.
- Events and activities that become "**news**" are determined by media decision-makers, who are guided by certain factors such as commercial interests, the target audience, media ownership and their world view. Decision-makers need, therefore, to be gender-sensitized.
- Women and gender activists need to take the initiative of ensuring that they get media coverage. In addition to responding to issues and events, they should also set the agenda for the media. The NCSW should act as a liaison body for media practitioners and women, in facilitating gender sensitization and coverage.
- There is need for media managers to recognise the multi-faceted roles of women and therefore take affirmative action in order to ensure women rise to media decision-making positions.
- There is need to change media attitudes which depict women as sex objects, to be admired and used. The NCSW and other women lobby groups should put pressure on advertising bodies to ensure positive portrayal of women in advertising. The media must reject advertisements that

portray women negatively.

- Media training should be geared towards acquisition of the traditional journalistic skills as well as gender sensitivity for both women and men in the media.
- The media should approach women and men equally for comment on issues of national importance.
- The media should treat women issues as human rights issues and therefore give them adequate and qualitative coverage.
- The NCSW and gender activists should critically review the use of the “women’s page” with a view to making its content more gender responsive.
- The media houses should democratise editorial decision-making as well as adhere to the universally acknowledged code of professional ethics.
- The NCSW and other gender trainers should develop a hand-book to raise gender awareness among media professionals.
- Women should take immediate action to form a lobby group with the sole purpose of acting as a watchdog on media portrayal of women.
- Visual artists, including cartoonists and photographers, in both print and electronic media should be gender-sensitized to project a positive image of women in the media.





## Appendix 1

### **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS: NCSW GENDER SENSITIZATION OF MEDIA PROJECT**

1.	Wangethi Mwangi	Group Managing Editor, Nation Newspapers
2.	Mumbi Risa	Features Editor, East African Standard
3.	Tom Mshindi	Managing Editor, Nation Newspapers
4.	Gladys Kemunto	Features Editor, Kenya Times
5.	Anne Marie Rosenlund	DANIDA
6.	Okech Kendo	Deputy Features Editor, East African Standard
7.	Lucy Oriang	Information Officer, NGO Council
8.	Mary D. K. Michieka	NCSW
9.	Margaretta Wa Gacheru	Features Writer, Nation Newspapers
10.	Wanjiku M. Kabira	Co-ordinator, CCGD
11.	Bernadette Muigai	NCSW
12.	Pauline Beauttah	NCSW
13.	Joe S. M. Kadhi	UON, School of Journalism
14.	Kwendo Opanga	Associate Editor, Nation Newspapers
15.	Florence Obura	Production Editor, Economic Review
16.	Maria Nzomo	Chair, NCSW
17.	Jane Some	Sub-Editor, Nation Newspapers
18.	Njeri Rugene	Reporter, Taifa Leo
19.	Papias Gitahi	Observer Magazine
20.	Seth Musisi	Target Magazine
21.	Lilian Nduta	Reporter, Nation Newspapers
22.	Zeke Waweru	UON, School of Journalism
23.	Wanjiku Mbugua	CCGD & FES
24.	Bantu Mwaura	Literary Artist
25.	Dommie Yambo - Odotte	Zebra Link
26.	Winnie Ogana	Photo journalist, World Vision
27.	Catherine W. Gicheru	Bureau Chief, Nation, Mombasa
28.	Dorothy Munyakho	Managing Editor, IRIS
29.	Alfred L. Mugambi	Legal Officer, United Insurance Co.
30.	Gichinga Ndirangu	Legal Officer, SNV
31.	Ruth N. Kibiti	NCSW
32.	Julie Ongudi	NCSW
33.	Grace Kelly	NCSW
34.	Jacinta Ndungu	NCSW
35.	Peter Wambu	Chief Designer, WEP Impressions