‘Mission Possible’: A Gender and Media Advocacy Toolkit

Module 4: Applying the results of GMMP 2005 in Gender and Media Advocacy

The findings of GMMP 1995, 2000 and 2005 have each shown the media the problems with the representations and portrayals of women and men in the news. The GMMP findings stimulate discussions on how these might be addressed. This module highlights the findings from GMMP 2005 (which took place in 76 countries on 16th February 2005) and illustrates how its findings can be effectively used for lobbying and advocacy work.
Module 4: Where is the evidence? Using GMMP 2005 in Gender and Media Advocacy

The media pride themselves on putting out news and information that is based on facts and evidence. Therefore, when gender and media activists go into the ‘lion’s den’ to challenge gender inequalities, it is important that they build their advocacy on facts that can be illustrated and verified with examples from the media. The first question media managers or editors will ask when complaints are brought is: Where is the evidence?

The 1994 ‘Women Empowering Communication’ conference in Bangkok, gave birth to a way for women to gather the evidence of gender inequalities in and through the media and to document with media examples many of the gender issues for the media highlighted in Chapter Two, of Section One of this toolkit.

One of the most significant outcomes of this gathering is the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which has given women a tool with which to scrutinize their media in a systematic way, and a means of documenting gender bias and exclusion. The GMMP provides a set of straightforward quantitative and now qualitative measures of media content that can be universally used and that provide useful research data and documentation for lobbying and advocacy work.¹

In the first GMMP in 1995, groups in 71 countries participated; in GMMP 2000 on February 18, 2000, 70 countries took part, and 52 of these were part of the original study; and 76 countries took part in GMMP 2005. The findings of the one-day monitoring of the media provide gender and media activists with insights into the key issues for gender and media advocacy at the global, regional and national levels.

This chapter highlights the findings of GMMP 2005 as key gender and media issues for activists to consider in both their new and ongoing gender and media advocacy work.

1. Who Makes the News? Sources

Sources are people interviewed by journalists to give their views and perspectives on the news events and current issues of the day. Sources are chosen because:

- They have specialist knowledge on the issue or event (‘experts’);
- They are among those greatly affected by the event or issue
- They are the ‘subjects’, or ‘main actors’ of an event or issue.

Who speaks and who does not speak in and through the media remains one of the key issues for gender and media advocacy as the GMMP 2005 findings show:

¹ Margaret Gallagher, Gender Setting New Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy, ZED Publishers and WACC, 2001
Women’s views and voices are marginalized in the world’s news media. Women constitute 52% of the world’s population, yet make up only 21% of the people featured in the news. Women are most underrepresented in radio where they are only 17% of news subjects as compared with 22% in television and 21% in newspapers.

Men’s voices dominate in hard news. Men are the majority of the news subjects in all story topics. Even when women do feature in the news, they are more likely to be found in ‘soft’ stories such as celebrity and arts where they make up 28% of news subjects and least likely to be found in ‘hard’ news stories about politics and government (14%) and the economy (20%).

Men dominate as spokespersons and experts. Some 86% of all people featured in news stories as spokespeople are men. Men also make up 83% of all experts. Women are much less likely to be considered experts in media coverage. Instead they are more often present as voices expressing personal experience (31%) or popular opinion (34%).

Box Eight: Women’s Voices in the Media- what other studies show

In May 2005, the Washington, D.C. based Project for Excellence released findings from a study across 45 different news outlets in the United States during 20 randomly selected days over nine months. More than three quarters of the 16,800 news stories collected featured male sources, while only one-third of the stories collected featured at least one female source.²

The 2003 Southern Africa Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS), coordinated by Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), in 12 countries covered a total of 25,110 news items in September 2002. The study revealed that women constituted only 17% of the news sources in a region where women constitute 52% of the population. [See www.genderlinks.org.za for the complete findings of the GMBS]

What is at stake as Gallagher highlights in her 2001 book Gender Setting: New Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy, is “not just the number of women who appear in the media, but the weight of their voices”.

2. Who Makes the News? News Content

Deciding who makes news, when and why are subjective choices made by journalists, editors and producers daily. These choices are often influenced not only by some of the standard criteria used to determine what is news i.e. prominence, proximity, major disasters, war and conflict, timeliness (events that happen now), crime, corruption, an act or event that is out of the ordinary, among others. The GMMP 2005 findings

also illustrate how gender biases and prejudices also are likely to influence the news content.

**Women are very unlikely to be the central focus of a story.** Only 10% of news stories worldwide have women as a central focus. The proportion of these stories varies widely across different topics. Women are central to the news story in 17% of ‘soft’ topics such as celebrity news, sports or social issues. Only 3% of stories on economics and 8% of stories on politics and government have women as a central focus.

**News stories are more likely to reinforce than challenge gender stereotypes.** Only 3% of stories challenged gender stereotypes compared with 6% stories that reinforced gender stereotypes. More generally though, news content reinforces gender stereotypes by depicting a world in which women are relatively invisible.

**Gender (in) equality is not considered newsworthy.** Some 96% of news stories worldwide do not highlight issues of gender equality or inequality. The stories monitored that do highlight gender equality or inequality make up only 4% of news stories.

3. **Who Makes the News? Portrayal**

**Women are more than twice as likely to be portrayed as victims than men.** Female and male victims are common currency in news programs. However, women are disproportionately represented in this way with 19% of women portrayed as victims compared with 8% men.

4. **Who Makes the News? Reporters and Presenters**

**News is still mainly reported and presented by men.** The only exception is among television presenters: 57% of television news stories were presented by women. Elsewhere women are a minority. This imbalance is most evident in newspapers where only 29% of newspaper items were written by female reporters.

**Female reporters are more likely to cover ‘soft’ news.** Men tend to cover the ‘hard’ topics – news that is perceived as ‘serious’. Only 32% of stories on politics and government are reported on by female journalists as compared with 40% of stories on social issues such as education or family relations.

**More female news subjects are found in stories reported on by female journalists.** In stories reported by women, 25% of news subjects are women as compared with 20% of news subjects in stories reported by men.

It is important to note, however, that being female and being a journalist does not automatically make for a gender-sensitive professional and it is often the case that female journalists reproduce gender stereotypes as much as their male colleagues. Female journalists should not be thought of as automatic allies when trying to change the media.
**Box Nine: Does the News Have Gender?**

Many women journalists assert that the news is not defined by gender. “The news is the news,” they say, whether it is reported by a woman or a man. They argue that standards of accuracy, fairness and ethics apply equally to all journalists, regardless of gender.

But could women journalists simply be taking their lead from male journalists who have set the atmosphere and standards of behavior in newsrooms? One editor from the United States thinks so. “Often women are conditioned to respond to news in a ‘male’ pattern. It’s how many of us avoid being labeled ‘too soft’ and get the positions we have,” she said. Women who want to cover politics and economics say they must follow the avenues set by their male colleagues or risk being assigned to soft news.

Still, the majority of women journalists say that their presence in newsrooms makes a difference in how news is selected and how it is presented.

Journalists completing a 2000 IWMF (International Women’s Media Foundation) survey felt strongly that women bring a more human dimension to the news. A senior editor from the Philippines commented, “Men tend to concentrate on quotes from government officials and focus on conflicts, while women tend to look at impact on the greatest number of people or sectors.”

Source: Leading in a Different Language: Will Women Change the News Media? Amy Johnson and Kimberly Campbell, IWMF, December 2000
Activity – Discussion Points!

1. Why do you think journalists do not interview women as sources for news? Do a few interviews with journalists from the print and broadcast media in your country to find out why they do not seek out women as sources. Make a list of the reasons given, and discuss in your network, solutions or strategies to tackle the reasons given by journalists for not interviewing women.

E.g. One reason journalists give for not interviewing women is that women ‘experts’ in particular are not visible and they do not know who they are. To address this, networks like the Mauritius Media Watch, have compiled resources like directories of women in various fields which provide a short profile and contact details. The Mail & Guardian newspaper in South Africa has a guide to the top women in South Africa in all fields.

2. Look for articles and broadcasts in which women are the central focus of the news story. What type of news stories are these – politics, economics, health, etc? Why are women the central focus in these stories? Begin to collect articles and tape broadcasts items where women are the central focus of the news. Organize a discussion with journalists in the print and broadcast media to get their views on why women are the main actors in the news stories and broadcasts collected, and not in other areas (especially if the pattern that emerges is that women appear in ‘soft’ topics as the GMMP 2005 findings show).

3. Why do you think women comprise a large majority of the presenters on television and are a minority in other areas of the media?