‘Mission Possible’: A Gender and Media Advocacy Toolkit

Module 8: How to Transform the Media through Policy

The blueprint for ensuring checks and balances within the media are systems of self-regulation and codes, which take shape in the form of workplace and editorial policies. Policy is important for the media’s accountability, trust and credibility to its audience. This module focuses on how gender and media advocacy can ensure that gender is included in media and communication policy development. It provides a checklist of key questions that can be used to conduct a gender audit of a media institution.
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Advocacy and lobbying strategies focused on persuading the media to develop gender workplace and editorial policies, and/or guidelines, have been key in starting consistent and sustained dialogues with the media community, regulatory bodies (where they exist), the government and the public on many of the gender and media issues highlighted in the GMMP 2005 (see module 4).

The blueprint for ensuring checks and balances within the media are systems of self-regulation and codes, which take shape in the form of workplace and editorial policies. Policy is important for the media for the following reasons:

**Media accountability**
The media’s responsibility should not stop with its own stated role of being a watchdog in the public’s interest. Media also must be accountable to their audiences and stakeholders and as an institution, should practice good governance, transparency and promote human rights within the workplace and in and through the news content.

**Trust and credibility**
If the public begins to identify gender, cultural, racial, religious or other forms of biases in the source of its news and information, then the media will lose audiences confidence and trust, and this can lead to declining audiences and shrinking markets. Credibility among all sectors of society is what many media build their sales and marketing pitches on.

Likewise, if the media do not see potential segments of society as the sites for potential new markets, or have the insight to stay on top of changes in the public’s needs, they will not remain viable businesses.

**Box Thirteen: Gender can affect the bottom line**

In Australia, media analyst Misha Schubert, notes that the business case for a fair portrayal of women in the media is increasingly replacing the justice plea: “as the principal household shoppers in 90 percent of homes, women form the primary target group for the majority of advertisers. Research has been successfully used to challenge sexist advertising and programming.”

Ensuring Diversity and Equal Opportunity in the workplace and output

The media’s workplace and leadership should be reflective of the society in which it operates. The media’s output should also reflect this diversity. If not, the media needs mechanisms to help bring about a fundamental change.

In an article on *What the United Nations Should Do, Marginalization of Women in the Media*, Sonia Gill, the Assistant Executive Director of the Broadcasting Commission in Jamaica, argues for more media advocacy and lobbying to ensure gender is inclusive to media and communication policy development. This will require however different skills from those that traditionally have been found in activists groups, Gill says. These new skills include:

- The ability to understand and analyze policy-making structures and to assist with the formulation of policies that encompass gender concerns.
- New research that moves beyond the existing pattern of gendered media studies, which are largely limited to descriptive assessments of the portrayal of women, to studies that relate issues identified to national media policy in a way that provides for recommendations for feasible policy amendment.
- The ability to open a dialogue with professional media associations and national regulatory bodies on setting and monitoring compliance with standards which speak to gender awareness of media entities.

**Activity- What policies are in place?**

Gender and media activists should do an audit of the internal and external media and communications policies, codes and guidelines that exist in their countries. Knowing what exists and what is missing can help to identify strategic areas for lobbying and advocacy initiatives. Some key questions include:

1. What does the Constitution guarantee in terms of freedom of expression and free speech?
2. Are there industry codes, guidelines and policies that guide professional standards on portrayal, language, coverage of violence, sexism in advertising, etc?
3. Do media houses have workplace and editorial polices and codes? Are these inclusive of gender? Are they published?
4. Are there regulatory bodies in place to ensure enforcement of policies, guidelines and codes?
5. Do licensing policies include gender and diversity criteria?

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Troubleshooting

Like all institutions confronted with the need to change, either from the inside or externally, there will be resistance and counter-arguments from the media. Calling for a change in media policies to change the portrayals of women and men, women’s limited access to expression, women’s limited access to leadership and management positions within the media, among other issues, requires that gender and media activists know the issues, have their facts and figures correct, and have plenty of examples from the media to illustrate their arguments and points. This is why research, understanding the media, and engaging with the media to have allies within with whom strategies can be discussed and refined are important to any successful gender and media advocacy.

Women’s Media Watch Jamaica, which has years of experience in lobbying the media on gender issues, provides several challenges in its 1998 training manual, Whose Perspective? A guide to gender-sensitive analysis of the media, activists are most likely to meet when lobbying the media for policy, guidelines and changes in the way they do their work.

Challenge 1 – *The media does not influence behavior, people know it is not reality.*
- Advertisers spend billions of dollars a year to persuade consumers to buy products and services in the belief that ads influence consumers. Often advertisers link their products to a certain lifestyle and image.

Challenge 2 – *Producers of media messages do not intend the meaning that you’re reading into it.*
- Think about the not so obvious effects: many messages aren’t immediately evident, but after frequent viewing, we absorb their underlying meaning
- Think of an example of a media image and its possible interpretations
- Why are the same images used over and over? What is the cumulative effect of repeated messages? Do they create stereotypes?

Challenge 3 – *The media just reflects what’s going on in society.*
- The media reinforces as well as reflects stereotypes
- The media are NOT representative – older women, fat women and people with disabilities are virtually absent from the mainstream media (yet all exist in the very society the media says it reflects).
- The news is very selective. Think about what is covered, how it is covered, the time allotted to news items, the order in which they are presented
- Who are the decision makers in the media?

Challenge 4 – *Aren’t men objectified in the media as well?*
- Yes, it is dehumanizing for any human being to be turned into an object. BUT men aren’t objectified as often as women, or in the same way as women
- The objectification of men is not as threatening, because men are a powerful group in our society
Challenge 5 – Using women to sell products does work, why should advertisers stop?
- The media is sometimes sensitive to issues of race. Is the same level of sensitivity shown towards sexism?
- If the media continues to demean women, half the population, what will stop it from treating other groups within society in the same way?
- Exploitation, by the media, of women’s insecurities about their physical appearance, is what sells beauty products.
- The media will only change if its financial interests are threatened; if viewers stop watching a program, refuse to buy a product or service.
- Growing consumer awareness has on occasions led to ads being pulled out or changed. One company moved from showing women draped over tires, to highlighting the quality of the tire. Media Watch in Mauritius also has had sexist advertising removed by mobilizing public opinion and taking complaints to the advertising regulatory body in the country.

Challenge 6 – This sounds like censorship – media houses and advertisers have the right to produce what they want, and I have the right to read, watch, and listen to anything.
- Censorship is not being advocated by gender and media activists. An alternative approach is to balance responsibility and sensitivity with marketability.
- Many racial stereotypes in the media have become unacceptable.
- Media managers often have considerable power over a publication’s editorial content, and therefore, decide what is published.

Challenge 7 – Aren’t the women the ones who allow themselves to be exploited by the media?
- Women are socialized by the same media into thinking that this is the correct and acceptable thing to do.
- The media often glamorizes these images, making them seem more attractive.
Box 15: Country and Regional Experiences in Engendering Communication and Media Policy

**CANADA** has one of the most comprehensive systems of gender and media policy, which has evolved out of a partnership between government, the media and non-governmental organizations. The balance between government legislation and industry self-regulation makes this system work. *(See case study on Canadian approach)*

**AUSTRALIA**’s government, through the Office on the Status of Women, initiated in 1986 a consultation with 26,000 women and found that women wanted the media to portray more realistic and positive images of women. In 1988, the government established the National Working Party on the Portrayal of Women in the Media and two working parties operated until 1993. These parties produced guidelines on sexist language, how to report on violence against women and on sexual exploitation in advertising. Changes in government however, have led to concerns among activists that many of the gains made are being reversed.

**SOUTHERN AFRICA**, where gender and media activism has taken off in the years following the publication of the 2003 Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS), saw in 2005 the launch of the Media Action Plan (MAP) on HIV/AIDS and Gender. MAP brings together a partnership between the media industry, civil society and the international community (UNAIDS, the PANOS Institute, for example) to improve the quality of media reporting on HIV/AIDS and gender. One of MAP’s key objectives is to ensure that 80% of media institutions in the region have workplace-based and editorial policies and programs on HIV/AIDS and gender by the end of 2008. The engagement with media houses to develop these policies will begin in 2006.

Source: adapted from WACC internal reports from regional conferences on Gender and Communication Policy experiences and MAP documents for Southern Africa.
Gender and Media Policy Checklist*

The following checklists provide a set of key questions that can be used to conduct a gender audit of a media institution. Depending on the focus of the campaign – editorial content, changes in the workplace to increase the employment and retention of women media professionals, the removal of sexist advertising, etc. – a set of questions are provided to help guide you through a situation analysis, which provides facts and figures for lobbying the media.

GENDER POLICY FRAMEWORK

International commitments
Are you aware of existing national, regional, international commitments to gender e.g. Constitution, Equality Act, CEDAW, and how they relate to their work?

National legislation
What national legislation and or regulatory authority govern you? To what extent is gender mainstreamed in this legislation?

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

EDITORIAL CONTENT

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

Representation
- Does coverage give fair and equal space/time to women and men’s voices?
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• Are reporters and editors trained to probe the gender issues that may underlie stories?
• Are women consulted across the racial and class spectrum?
• To the extent some women are difficult to reach, is sufficient effort and enough resources set aside for accessing these “marginal” groups?

Context
• Are a variety of sources, representing a broad spectrum of views, consulted?
• Is there a specialist civil society organization on the issue? Has this source been consulted?
• Is there adequate context and balance?
• Is the story analytical? Does it go beyond the event and raise the underlying issues?

Portrayal
• Does your coverage reflect a holistic and realistic view of women and do they appear in the full spectrum of activities in which they engage?
• To the extent that women are missing from certain categories because of their status in society, does the coverage raise critical questions as to why this is so?
• Are male and female subjects treated equally?
• Does your story apportion blame on the subject?
• Does your story exonerate the perpetrator?
• Are all subjects treated with dignity?
• Does the story challenge or reinforce stereotypes?
• Does it examine the underlying issues?
• Are these approached from a human rights perspective?
• Are the experiences and concerns of women trivialized in any way?
• Is your story fair, accurate and balanced?

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

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

Programming
- Do you have special spaces/ slots for women?
- Should these be for gender rather than for women?
- Is the difference understood?
- Who are you addressing in these spaces?
- Where are they placed?
- For audio- visual media, do they take account of the dual roles and time constraints of women?
- Are they available during prime time when the largest number of men and women are likely to be watching and or listening?

SALES AND MARKETING

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

Readership/Listener and viewer surveys
- Does gender feature in readership/ listener/ viewer ship surveys?
- Do you conduct focus group surveys to solicit the views of audiences to products? Are men and women equally represented? Are the results disaggregated by gender? Are they acted upon?
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INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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

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

Selection
- Are your selection panels gender balanced?
- Do you ensure a minimum quota for women in the short-listing process?
- Do the same standards apply to women and men in the interview process? For example, would you ask a man whether he was married and had children or intended to have any in the future?
- How are family considerations raised and addressed in the interview process?

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

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

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

Capacity building
• Do all your employees have access to staff development programs, and are these offered at suitable hours?
• Do you target women for training?
• Do you have mentorship programs in place?
• Are these specifically targeted at women?
• Does the organization offer assertiveness training and are men and women equally encouraged to undergo this training?

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

GENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Champions
• Is there a champion for the gender policy in your organization?
• Is this person at management level?
Governance level
- To what extent does the board/management regard gender mainstreaming as a priority?

Administrative level
- To what extent does the management of the organization take gender mainstreaming seriously?
- To what extent does all staff take gender mainstreaming as their responsibility?
- Are gender considerations built into the overall performance management system?
- To what extent is performance in this area measured and rewarded?
- To what extent do turnover and lack of continuity and “institutional memory” hinder gender mainstreaming in the organization?
- Are gender resource materials available and accessible?

Structures

Formal
- What specific structures have been created for gender mainstreaming?
  - Do these include human resources, the editorial and advertising departments?
  - Is there a committee that includes all three?
  - Is there a gender structure/unit/focal point (GFP)?
  - At what level is the gender focal point employed?
  - What access to/ influence on decision makers, does the gender focal point have?
  - What other responsibilities does the gender focal point have?
  - Has the GFP received gender training?
  - Does the GFP have clear terms of reference?
  - Is gender part of the GFP job description or is it an add-on?

Informal
- What informal structures have been created to encourage understanding and buy in? (For example a gender forum, brown bag lunches)?
  - Do they include men and women?
  - Are women encouraged to form support networks and structures?
  - Are these structures accorded respect and status and given time to meet?
  - Do these structures network with civil society?

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

Monitoring, evaluation and resource allocation
- Do you have an internal system to undertake content analysis?
  - Is gender one of the criteria?
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- What gender indicators have been developed?
- Are statistics disaggregated by gender?
- Does content analysis examine: a) events and issues through the voices of both men and women b) stories highlighting the impact of events on men and women? c) Thematic analysis to ensure that issues covered reflect gender challenges?
- Do you engage with research findings by civil society, private sector and other bodies on the way in which gender is covered by the media, and on sexist attitudes in society?
- Are there internal mechanisms for monitoring the overall gender policy including conditions of service and how they impact on men and women?
- How is the budget divided up within each program?
- What is the effect of this with regard to advancing gender equality?
- How do women benefit from the budget compared to men?
- Would the budget need to shift to address gender objectives more effectively?
- Is there an annual review of the implementation of the gender policy?