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GENDER AND MEDIA

The Dos and Don'ts in the News Room



Man, a missing link! Any effort to bridge the gap is good practice.



Uganda Media Women's Association, UMWA, has compiled this simple Guide for you – the reporters, editors, or anybody who would wish to develop or present content in a gender sensitive way.

The Key words:

- Gender:** Which implies female and male.
- Sensitivity:** To some extent implies: empathy, deliberate, “carefulness”.



GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING

Committed to have equal representation in the news

Justification for Gender Sensitive Reporting

● If Uganda's population is constituted of 51% women and 49% men; and gender is about those two, then indeed, we should be talking and walking those percentage proportions! Right?

Media Reporting Today:

Current statistics portray glaring gender gaps e.g. visibility: 85% males, 15% females.

So what is a Gender Sensitive Story?

UNESCO and the WACC's Global Media Monitoring Project present at least 20 parameters. This Guide will look at ten. Enjoy, but let's walk the 51/49 proportion!

News Subjects:

A news subject is the person(s) being written about. It is that person who has made the news!

While it is important to have equal representation of both men and women as news subjects, it is even more key to seek their views because they are not dummies! Important, therefore, to be deliberate and have equal number of quotes from the male and female news subjects. Even in vulnerable situations, (violence and the like) voices of both males, and females whether victims or not, are important.

Equal representation should also be seen on what subject matter



A female presenter engaging a male News Subject is good practice in gender sensitive reporting.

she or he is being quoted on: the political / economy or the so-called soft areas like family / art, etc.

Reporters should be seen to write about men and women from both the public and domestic spheres. For example, a journalist or media house should not choose to write about men of high social / economic status – but when it comes to women – the focus is on the vulnerable / marginalized. Yet others choose to write about women of high standing political / economic status during the Women's Day only, or when a catastrophe has befallen them. Surely men cannot be the news makers every day!!

Sources:

A source or sources are people

whose views / opinions are relayed in the story. They can be the news subjects themselves, or those the reporter deems important to have his/her say on the subject matter.

Care should, therefore, be taken to source for views / opinions / responses from men and women in equal measure, on any subject matter (public or domestic, politics or family) etc.

Images / Photographs:

Pictures tell stories: Both men and women should therefore be given an opportunity to tell the story in equal measure. Care should therefore be given to:

- The type, size and the number of times the images depicting men and women in each single story;

GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING

pace, front, odd and even pages should be shared equally for the images of men and women;

- Inactive pictures where women for example, are put on Page One or any other page without any reference to them, should be discouraged;
- The camera focus should be away from the physicality of a person e.g. the breasts or the behind of the woman; but rather on the facial expressions like it usually is for men;
- There should be balance in the type of picture ('fresh' or 'file') that are published. The practice of publishing 'file' photos of women but 'fresh' for men should be discouraged if justice and fairness is to go by;
- If it is a picture from the beach – surely men too swim or enjoy the sand! Pictures of both men and women – half dressed as the beach requires should be published instead of having women's only!!

Amount of Space:

Since women and men constitute Uganda's population almost in equal proportions (51% women / 49% men), it should naturally follow that even the space in our media should follow that equation!

Placement/ Positioning:

Will it be on the front, back page; on the first five pages, in the centre spread? On odd or even page? Prime time, Monday or on the weekend? Which story will come first, or last, which guest will speak first, or last;

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Panels can be more productive if men and women are equally represented as guests or as moderators/hosts



which topic to discuss first or last? Such are some of the questions that media managers have to deal with almost everyday.

Different positions or placement attract different attention, or action if at all. A gender sensitive media person will therefore ensure that content on women and men is equitably positioned, but not to display stories about women with positive attributes on 'insignificant' pages while those with negative connotations about them are put, on the strategic pages like front/ odd pages, which is currently a preserve for men!!

Managing / Delivery of News:

- Equal representation of men and women in the management, gathering and delivery of news should be seen to happen.
- Not forgetting assigning of male and female reporters on any subject matter, without zoning – politics / economy for men; or family and other social issues for women.
- Female reporters should be seen doing stories on male

subjects, while males are crossing to writing about the so-called women's issues.

- But the key is for both female and male reporters to equally cover both genders on the public and domestic matters.

Stories with a Central Focus on Women:

Since the progressive media concur with the world order for the need to focus on women due to the long-term marginalization they have suffered; such stories ought to sound progressive too. E.g. Women's points of view are key. The negative beliefs and stereotypes ought not to be presented to reinforce the marginalization and the gender stereotypes. Good stories should challenge those stereotypes and negative beliefs.

- Important to break down the statistics (gender disaggregated data) to make a case for the needed change. And where applicable, such stories should refer to the pro-gender equality laws or policies.



Mind the language

Identity:

Titles especially those related to family are very symbolic and important, but they can be damaging especially if they present an individual as inferior or, dependent. Titles should add something to the subject matter being reported on. Look at this: The Minister of Education Janet K, wife to the President, has said..... The question would instead be: When should the wife to the President be used?!

It may therefore be safer to present individuals in their own right unless he/she prefers to be addressed as for example, so and so....., daughter to, so and so....., son to....., husband to, wife to, brother, sister to....., etc.

However, once you decide to identify people by family or professional ties, consistence is a MUST. Therefore, don't say Margaret Namagembe, a daughter to and you talk about a Mr. Ronald Muwanga (when actually both are children to the same person).

Equally important: Don't address Bukirwa as Ms. and Muwanga as Engineer, when both are actually Engineers. Judges are judges as Doctors are doctors. There is therefore no need, to prefix the professional title with somebody's gender. Therefore drop Lady Justice Nalwoga for Justice Nalwoga. Like it is not necessary to address a woman managing a meeting as a Woman Chair. Chairperson is enough, like it is enough for Gate Keeper for either man or woman.

Portrayal / Presentation / Language:

Care should be taken when presenting content about or / images of men and women. Avoid presenting any of the genders in poor, or degrading light. Not even suggesting that one gender is meant to be superior, more experienced, stronger, knowledgeable, etc, than the other.

- Use words or the language / tone that is non-discriminatory, patronizing, sexist, judgmental, or derogatory to neither gender.

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Would NBS "Big Deal" be better if a man was part of the package? Maybe yes.....What do you think?



A television or radio talk show host should for example desist from addressing the guests as "my sister" or "what is the women's take on this subject?" "Let's hear what the amiable lady says on this subject...". Other phrases that are worthy dropping are: The iron ladies, etc.....

- An example of judgmental language: "The woman who was raped yesterday, had been earlier on spotted wearing a skimpy dress, and moving alone in the dark, in fact it was 10 pm".

UMWA is an umbrella organization for female journalists, part of whose core business is to improve the presentation and representation of women in, and by the media. UMWA has a wealth of expertise and experience in gender mainstreaming and monitoring the media!

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