

GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING?

It is Easy!

Some Tips for You...



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ABOUT THE GUIDE

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 booklet comprises of simple tips a media practitioner / trainer can adopt to make your production gender responsive.

The *Annex* provides a yet a simple way of communicating equality in the story.

The Key words:

- **Gender:** which implies female and male.
- **Sensitivity:** to some extent implies: empathy, fairness, justice, being deliberate, "carefulness".

GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING

Definition

A gender sensitive media product is one that not only accurately mirrors our society and that provides coverage that is **complete and diverse** but also one that reflects the world, as seen through the eyes of women and men, and one that doesn't recreate notions of one gender's superiority over another.

Rationale: Why Gender Sensitive Reporting?

1. Women constitute more than half of the global population. At the national level, estimates as by June 2018 show that Uganda's population stands at 44,224, 279 of whom 22,222,700 (50.25%) are female and 22,001,579 (49.75%) male (Uganda Bureau of Statistics/ World Population Prospects - 2017 Revision). Therefore, it is only fair that that proportionality is reflected in both media practice and media content.
2. As part of its watchdog role, media should monitor the implementation of gender equality laws, policies, protocols, and any other legal instruments, at both National and International levels, aimed at promoting gender equality. Making reference to such instruments should form part of media content.
3. Gender sensitive reporting is essential to contributing to more balanced representation of society. Sane relations between women and men at all levels of society rest on a respectful and dignified representation of all actors as well as appropriate space for diverse voices.
4. Gender equality is an integral part of freedom of expression as all people (women and men) have the right to be heard and seen in the public sphere as full-fledge citizens participating in a democratic society. Gender balance is thus important in news reporting. Equally important is the need to challenge prevailing stereotypes.
5. Research done over the years regarding gender and media shows that media content doesn't reflect a realistic view of women and men, a situation that needs to be redressed. Media ownership for example, is over 80% owned by men; senior management positions, 80% filled by men. Male journalists are almost 80% favoured for covering the so-called hard beats while 80% of news subjects, 80% pictures and 84% of the sources are men. (Refer to Study on: *Gender Dimensions in the Print Media: An Analysis of News Content on Peace, Security and Conflict (May - June 2017)*).

Likewise, men's views or images do not only enjoy more space but are also strategically placed / positioned. Front pages are usually a preserve for men while women are carelessly placed on the inside pages. On the talk shows, male guests speak first, and females last". But it is important to note that sometimes, that is not the case. For example, when women, especially those in positions of responsibility, make mistakes or commit crimes, the news is usually hyped beyond proportion in comparison to when men do the same or even worse. That is when women make front pages and headlines.

There is also a tendency for the media to trivialize and debase stories about women or those of issues specific to women. This is done, inter alia, by sandwiching them between sensational stories, catchy phrases and images. This certainly draws the attention of the reader (s) from such stories.

But who can change the situation?

The above notwithstanding, the media can play a very important role in promoting gender equality in society - generally, and in media practice and content in particular. It is recognized that one of the key challenges is how to change mindsets hardened by

countries of socialization and cemented by custom, culture and religion. However, there is great potential for the media to play a huge role in this liberation of the mind, in three major ways: Becoming part of the solution, rather than being part of the problem; Taking kindly to being “watched” the way it has set itself up as the watch dog of the rest of the society, and; Considering adopting the following suggestions aimed at making gender sensitive reporting a standard journalist practice.

All media personnel, both men and women have a major role to play in ensuring gender inclusiveness in the media and ensuring that they change attitudes by portraying women and men as they really are rather than reinforcing gender based stereotypes.

THE GENDER GUIDELINES

These Gender Sensitive Media Reporting Guidelines are aimed at supporting the media in their efforts to depict the world in a more gender sensitive and gender responsive manner, thus contributing to more inclusive and equal societies. They are based upon four (4) major pillars:

Pillar 1: Selection of sources and stories in order to achieve balanced presence of women and men, reflecting the composition of society and human experiences.

In order to achieve more gender equality in media content:

- Pay attention to achieve balanced representation **of women and men seen, heard or read about** in news and current affairs. Also make special consideration to make sure diverse stories and voices of people, particularly the ones that are often almost invisible in media (e.g. older women and persons living with disabilities), are included and represented.
- Pay attention to **balanced representation of women and men in the news and media in all spheres**, including making sure to report on stories of women in the (often male dominated) areas, such as politics and government, economic and business, war and conflicts, science and technology, sports, etc.
- Pay attention to balanced representation of **men and women as sources of information, opinion and expertise** in the news (e.g. make sure you pay attention to involve women as experts and professionals, not only as “ordinary” persons or victims).

Note: 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.

- Ensure that **your sources represent a range of opinions coming from diverse groups**, including from often neglected groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, the youth, ethnic communities, etc.). If relevant, **consult women’s rights NGOs and other groups working on gender equality** or representing the group in question, to get more balanced views.
- Ensure that a proportion of stories **focus specifically on women or issues considered as of a particular concern for women** (e.g. gender-based violence, women's rights, women's achievements, etc.). Also, you need to pay attention to covering stories focusing on issues of **gender equality/inequality** (stories about specific cases of

equality or inequality between women and men, relevant policies, legislative and policy issues, programs designed to promote gender equality and transform unequal gender norms). **Ensure these stories get a fair share of prominence in your media.**

Pillar 2: Fair portrayal of women and men through elimination of stereotypes and promotion of multi-dimensional representation/portrayal.

The media plays a very significant role in shaping public perceptions about women and men, therefore it is important that reporting avoids any form of gender stereotypes, which often limit and trivialize females and males, as well as presenting an inaccurate view of the world and its possibilities. Furthermore, the use of stereotypes reflects a mental block not only in terms of what society may expect from women and men, but also—more seriously—in terms of what women and men may expect from themselves.

UNESCO, 2012.

In order to ensure fair portrayal of women and men:

- **Avoid stories with stereotypes**, including openly sexist's interpretations of the characteristic and roles of women and men in society. Furthermore, try **not to make any gender based assumptions**, including in depiction of traditional “feminine/masculine characteristics and male/female roles” (e.g. *try to avoid representing certain jobs or roles as only appropriate for, or held by, women or men, i.e., farmers are men and elementary teachers are women, or using common stereotypes reinforcing gender roles, e.g. portraying women as mothers, homemakers, etc.*).
- Do not represent females and males as possessing **stereotypic gendered attributes and characteristics**. *For example, do not imply that girls are timid and boys are brave; males are admired for their accomplishments and women for their physical attributes; females are passive and males are active. Equally, in the case of crime, violence, disasters etc. do not portray only women as victims and men as survivors.*
- Ensure you include stories that show multidimensional representation/portrayal of men and women (indicating journalistic effort to challenge/counter gender-based stereotypes).
- Ensure you have a **fair portrayal of men and women in commercial ads, commercial messages and images**, trying to minimize ads for various product categories or services that stereotype or naturalize gender roles (e.g. *household goods associated with cooking and cleaning, food, beverages, products for children, electronic goods; mainly women in services such as education, health, childcare, and men in banking and investment, real estate, sport events, etc.*).
- Avoid depiction of sexuality in ads and images, particularly depicting women as sexual objects. Also pay attention to having a balanced proportion of ads that show women and men appearing assertive rather than passive in advertisements (voices and images), and that women and men are capable of participating in different occupations, be they of a public or domestic nature, etc.

Stories with a Central Focus on Women

- Since the progressive media concur with the world order that there is 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.
- **Images and Photographs:** Pictures tell stories- Both men and women should therefore be given an opportunity, through these images, to tell their stories 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;
 - Placement and the allocated space, *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.
 - Pictures from beach scenes should show both men and women - half dressed as the beach requires instead of having women's only, because surely men too swim or enjoy the sand, half dressed.
- **A Program Title or News Headline:**
A title or the headline may be the most important piece of the story. Most people do not read the text, but are quick to grasp the title or the headline. It is therefore important to have headlines that:-
 - are not discriminatory in nature;
 - do not denigrate, ridicule, or stigmatize anybody;
 - do not patronize or domesticate anybody;
 - not stereotypic.

Pillar 3: Use of Gender Sensitive Language

Structures of many societies have been based on assumptions of sex-biased roles, which are entrenched in the use of language. To be truly equal, women and men must be seen and heard to be equal. This means eliminating language that misrepresents, excludes or offends especially women, or any gender. Careful use of language and images in the media will give a more accurate reflection of your audience or readership, and this can positively affect people's consciousness over time.

UNESCO, 2012.

The use of gender-specific language often implies male superiority or reflects an unequal state of society.

Therefore, in an attempt to use the gender sensitive language:

- **Avoid using “he” as a generic pronoun**, unless the gender of the subject is known and is relevant to the context. The pseudo-generic *he* or *his*, when referring to both a female and a male excludes the female. To be inclusive, use both *he* and *she*, and consciously balance pronoun use by sometimes reversing their order. *For example: Instead of “If a student studies hard, he will succeed”, use “If a student studies hard, he or she will succeed or, If a student studies hard, s/he will succeed or, Students who study hard will succeed”.*
- **Avoid using “man” as a generic noun**, as if men represent the whole human race. The use of the word *man* to represent both women and men excludes women, and it minimalizes their contributions and their worth as human beings. *For example, to make language more inclusive use “humanity, human beings, people” instead of “mankind”, “artificial materials” instead of “man-made materials”; use “the best person for the job” instead of “the best man for the job”, etc.*
- When describing a job or career both men and women might perform avoid using terms that specify gender and replace **gender-specific words with gender-neutral words** in order to avoid associating men and women with certain professions. *For example: instead of chairman/chairwoman use chair, coordinator, moderator, presiding officer, head, chairperson, etc.; businessman/businesswoman use business executive, manager, businessperson; policeman/policewoman use police officer; mailman use postal worker, letter carrier, etc.*
- **Seek alternatives to language that omits, patronizes, or trivializes women**, as well as to language that reinforces stereotyped images of both women and men. *For example: Don’t use terms like “the little lady” or “better half” when you are referring to someone’s spouse, or wife. Avoid the use of exaggerated language such as “Black beauty wins song contest!”, “Mother of three elopes with lover”, “Woman driver crashes into fence”, “Maria is a career woman”, “I like her not only because she is beautiful but also because she is brilliant”, “She has shown that she can combine beauty with brains”, etc.*
- When referring to men and women, make sure they are addressed in the same manner. *For example, instead of saying “Mr. Senkunya and Mary Senkunya” refer to them as “John Senkunya and Mary Senkunya” (using both of their first names) or “Mr. Senkunya and Ms. Mary” (using titles, rather than names); instead of “The reading list included Jane Abeja, Nandala, Mugoya, and Virginia Wanyenze)” use “The reading list included Abeja, Nandala, Mugoya, and Wanyenze (or Jane Abeja, James Nandala, Patrick Mugoya, and Virginia Wanyenze)”.*
- Use courtesy titles that promote gender equity. *For example: Instead of Miss, Mrs., use Ms.*
- Describe a woman as her own person, and not in relationship to someone else. Try to avoid forms of address that depict a woman as the mere appendage of her husband, which trivializes women or render them invisible. *For example, instead of saying “Mary Ssansa, who is married to John Ssansa”, say “Mary Sansa, who is a writer, doctor, engineer,” or instead of “The steward seated Mr. Mayanja and his lovely wife Mary”, use “The steward seated Mr. and Mrs. Mayanja”.*

Note: 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, who is also wife to the President, has said.....*

*The question is: When should **wife to the President** be used? It is, therefore, important to conceptualize the capacity under which this person is appearing in the news/ programme - is the person appearing as someone's wife or as the Education Minister?*

It is, therefore, better to present individuals in their own right unless he/she prefers to be addressed as for example, *so and so....., daughter / son / husband / wife / mother/ father/ brother/ sister of, etc.*

However, once you decide to identify people by family or professional ties, there should be consistence. For example, don't say Margaret Kafeero, a daughter to and you talk about a Mr. Ronald Muwanga ... (when actually both are children to the same person).

IMPORTANT!

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; 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.

Pillar 4: Gender equality within the media organizations

The studies show that while women have considerably outnumbered men in university-level and practice-based journalism programmes and that the employment of women in media is increasing, the organisational culture of media remains largely masculine and women are still significantly under-represented at the decision-making level.

(European Institute for Gender Equality, 2012)

In order to achieve greater gender equality in a media house, try to:

- Guarantee **balanced representation of women and men in ownership, business management, board positions**, as well as of women and men holding leadership positions within media (e.g. editors in chief, editors, head of departments, and heads of desks.)
- **When it comes to Managing / Delivery of News ensure that:**
 - 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** write about both genders on the public and domestic matters.

- **Develop policies on gender equality/codes of conduct;**
 - equality opportunities/diversity (including gender);
 - sexual harassment in the workplace;
 - dignity in the work-place;
 - work-life balance (policy of flexible working arrangements, availability and accessibility of quality child care and support facilities for all staff members, etc.)
- **Develop a human resource policy on gender equality by:**
 - Ensuring that there are equal and transparent recruitment practices.
 - Having in place gender balanced interviews and appraisal panels.
 - Ensuring the selection, recruitment, career pathing, capacity building and training, fast tracking and promotion, etc. are devoid of gender discrimination.
 - Securing equal treatment with respect to general working conditions/environment and rights including wages for women and men, transparent pay scale within the media company, that uses the same criteria to determine pay structures for men and women.
 - Encourage friendly work practices and mutual respect between women and men. For example, there should be no tolerance for sexual harassment and bullying.
 - Where sexual harassment occurs, it should be treated as an illegal act demanding legal redress;
 - The implications of sexual harassment and bullying for survivors as well as the consequences for anybody indulging in such practices be made known to management and all employees;
 - Establish independent platforms to which deviationists and perpetrators can be reported in confidentiality to enable the aggrieved or any other concerned party forward their grievances without fear, and;
 - Have a directory of support centres which survivors can access to get redress.
- Develop and enforce a policy on equal access to, and utilization of organizational facilities, e.g. computers, recorders, the console, etc. to all staff.
- Equal representation of men and women in the management, gathering and delivery of news should be seen to happen, i.e., give equal opportunity to all journalists, irrespective of gender, to work across a diversity of beats.
 - Assigning of male and female reporters on any subject matter, without zoning - politics / economy for men; or family and other so-called women's issues for females.
 - Both male and female reporters should be seen doing stories on male and female subjects.
 - But the key is for both female and male reporters to **equally** cover both genders on the public and domestic matters.
- Establish a **Gender Desk** and appoint a **Gender Mainstreaming Officer** for purposes of **monitoring and evaluating of gender equality** in the work space.
- Introduce **practical measures to foster women's advancement and the portrayal of women** in the media including trainee positions specifically for women; leadership/management training for women; equality awareness training for staff, etc.

The above notwithstanding, it is important that media houses take a keen interest in what negates gender-sensitive reporting and take appropriate action. Below is a summary.

WHAT IMPACTS GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING?

Gender sensitive reporting is impacted by a wide range of factors including, but not limited to, the following:-

- The individual media practitioner's upbringing, life experiences and socialization.
- The policy and editorial line of the media house.
- The economic pressures leading to cost-cutting and thus favoring less expensive forms of reporting with little or no verification.
- The competition for eyeballs leading to sensationalist stories with cheap angles.
- Limited availability of on-the-job training and coaching for young journalists - but also for senior journalists - to keep abreast of social developments.