



# Mainstream and social media

# 5



Journalists covering Gender and News Summit in Tanzania.

*Credit: Aikha Kimora*

## KEY POINTS

- Gender equality is intrinsic to freedom of expression. Yet women's voices make up less than one quarter of those whose views and voices are heard in the news media.
- Women comprised 22% of news sources in Africa (16% in the political topic category) compared to the global average of 24% the 2015 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP).
- Women reporters increased from 24% in 2000 to 35% in 2015: a positive trend, though still short of parity.
- Stereotypes and controversies most often underpin coverage of women in top positions. But media can be used to challenge stereotypes.
- Social media should provide political parties and movements with a significant and powerful new communication tool. On the other hand, new media also brings problems and challenges, especially to women in politics.

The ability to impart and receive information, without the unwarranted interference of the State or of other powerful institutions, is a fundamental freedom in a democracy. As the *fourth arm* of democracy, media have an important role in ensuring that all democratic principles are upheld, especially during elections when a person's vote is equivalent to their voice.

While media freedom has come a long way in Africa over the last decade, the constant threat to free media is heightened at times of peak power struggles, such as elections. The media plays a key role in determining how women and men in politics and decision-making are viewed by

society. During elections, media have a responsibility to give “voice to the voiceless” - a category in which women predominate. Women are however, grossly underrepresented, misrepresented and often treated unfairly in the media coverage of politics and elections.

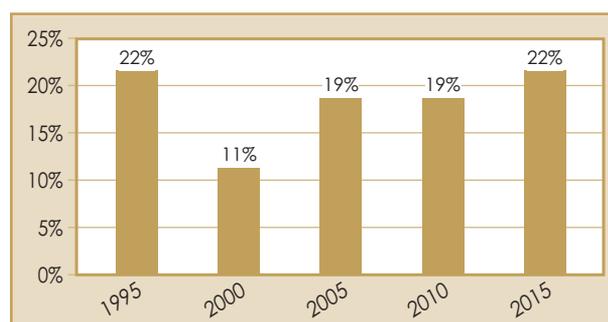
This chapter covers key areas and issues concerning gender, media, politics and elections. It includes a section on social media, recognised as a crucial new area in election management. The chapter ends with key recommendations on mainstreaming gender in the media and mainstreaming media in the work of women politicians and gender activists.

## Women in the news and in election coverage

Gender equality and equality of all voices is intrinsic to freedom of expression. Studies have repeatedly shown that women's voices make up less than one-quarter of those whose views and voices are heard in the news media. This “silent censorship” has given rise to a global gender and media movement demanding gender equality “in and through the media.”<sup>1</sup>

Inclusivity, especially in the media, is central to elections. Journalists are often encouraged to seek diverse perspectives and interview sources representing different sexes, races, classes, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds. An important role of media in a democracy, and particularly during an election is not only to inform the public, but to ensure that all these voices and opinions are heard. Even though women make up more than half of the population in many countries, their voices are often missing in election coverage. Male dominance of politics is underscored by their dominance in news coverage of the elections and their voices' magnification.

Figure 5.1: Women sources in the news in Africa 1995-2015



Source: GMMP 2015.

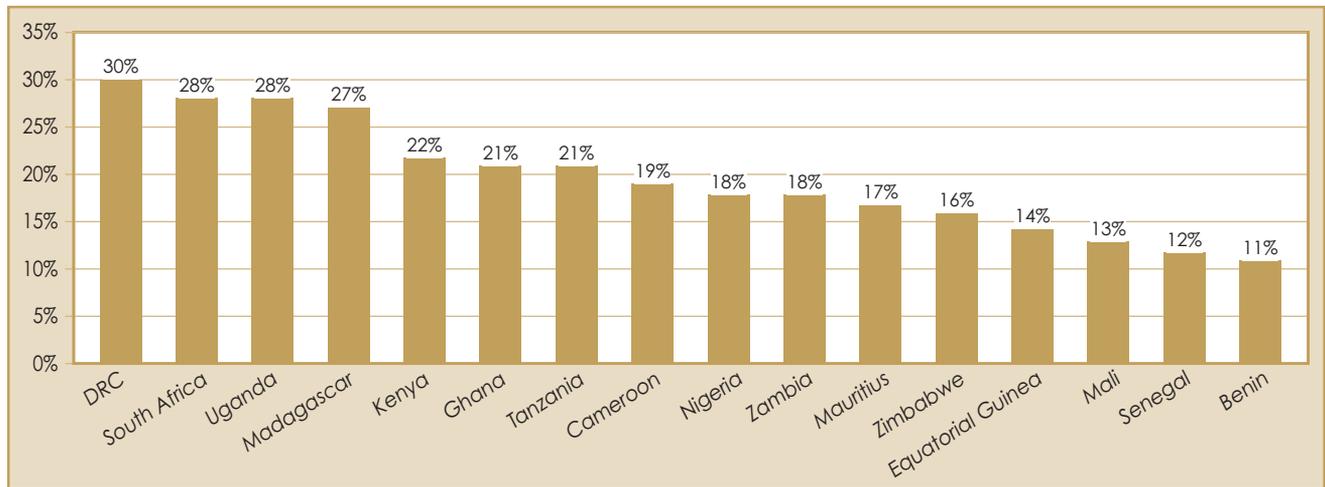
Figure 5.1 is extracted from the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2015 results. This one-day monitoring has taken place every five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The 2020 results were unfortunately not available at the time of going to press. In 2015, 23 countries spread across East, West, North, Southern, and East Africa participated in the study. This has been fairly consistent over the five year intervals. Figure 5.1

<sup>1</sup> Gender Links' first slogan

shows that except for 2000, the proportion of women sources has remained relatively constant at 19% to 22%, compared to the global average of 24%. The GMMP 2015 study comments:

“women make up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news, exactly as they did in 2010.”<sup>2</sup>

Figure 5.2: Women sources by country in Africa GMPS 2015

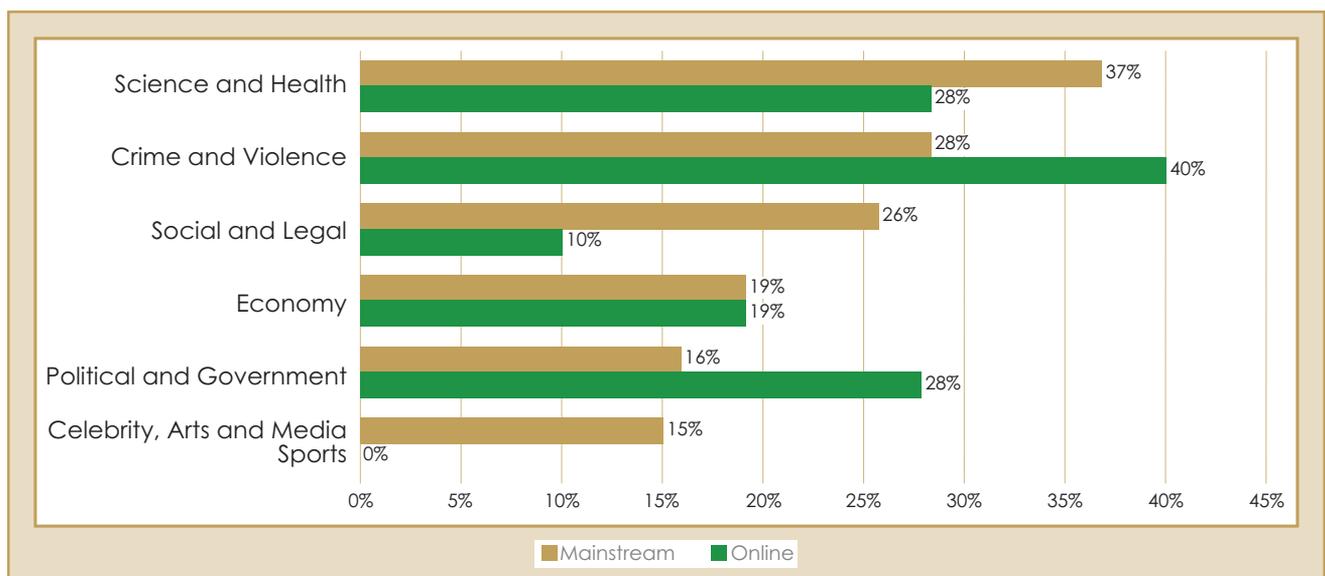


Source: Gender and Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2015.

Figure 5.2 is an extract of the 16 African countries in the 2015 studies with more than 100 stories analysed on the day of monitoring<sup>3</sup>. DRC (30%) had the highest proportion of women sources,

followed by South Africa and Uganda (28%). Mali (13%), Senegal (12%) and Benin (11%) had the lowest proportion of women sources.

Figure 5.3: Women sources in African news by topic GMMP 2015



Source: GMMP 2015.

<sup>2</sup> World Association of Christian Communicators, *Global Media Monitoring Project* (Toronto: WACC, 2015)  
<sup>3</sup> Smaller samples give unreliable results.

Figure 5.3 reflects women sources in Africa by topic in mainstream and online media for the 2015 GMMP. This shows that at 16%, women's views and voices are second least reflected in the politics and government topic category, slightly higher than 15% in the celebrity, arts, media and sports category (with sports likely bringing this overall average down). At 28% women have a greater presence in online media. However, this is also fraught with challenges (see later in the chapter).

In addition to appearing in a limited number of roles, women are often simply missing in the media. They are much less likely to be featured in news stories and less likely to be interviewed and asked for opinions than men. Certain categories of women receive even less attention in the media, such as elderly women, and women from minority ethnicities and religious groups, the working class, and women with different sexual orientations.<sup>4</sup>

## Women missing in action in North Africa

All the progress recorded in **North Africa** has not brought about better women's representation in the media.<sup>5</sup> The portrayal of woman in the media reflects a society deeply rooted in traditions and influenced by Islamist discourse. Women are less interviewed than men in political and economic news, unless they are ministers or important civil servants. Their opinions are marginalised and they are often represented as victims, as social recipients or locked in traditional roles.

Efforts to challenge gender stereotypes have focused on woman “champions”. This has led to backlash in some quarters with media celebrating sex, violence and sensationalism in response to these positive portrayals. The representation of women in the North Africa media thus often swings between the extremes of women “victims” and women “champions”.



In **Morocco**, according to the 2015 GMMP, women accounted for 20% of subjects or sources of news, below the African average of 22% and the world average of 24%. The report also indicates that women are mostly reflected in the social and legal topic categories (60%); 24% in the economic field, and only 5% in the political and governmental topic category.

Many audiovisual journalists are now aware of these issues. Public media have set-up gender equity committees in their organisations. Soread 2M has set up a platform called experts.ma, a database of women experts in Morocco who can be interviewed by journalists on all subjects, not just women's affairs.



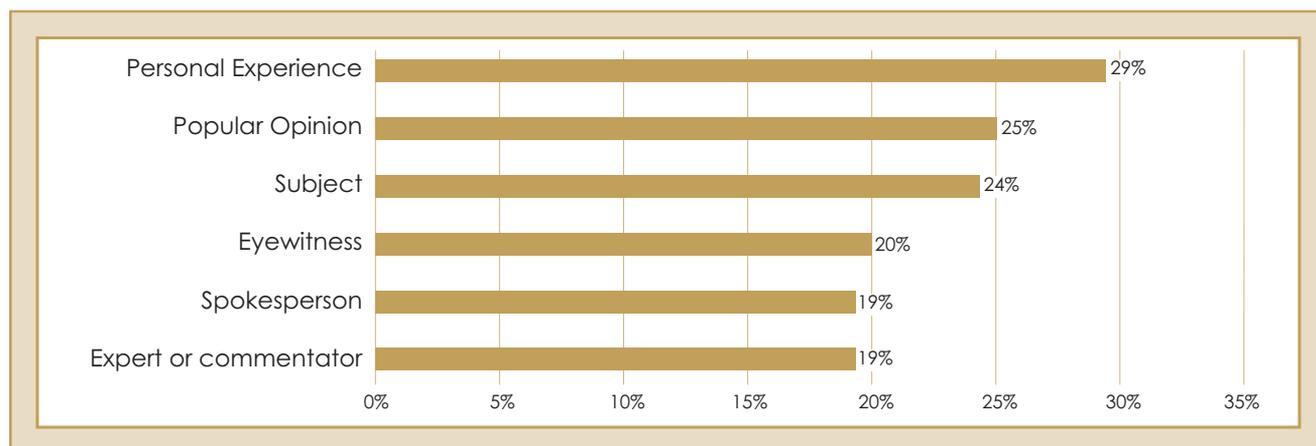
A study conducted by the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Media Monitoring project in **Algeria** in 2015, in partnership with the Algerian League of Defense of Human Rights, shows that women constituted a mere 29% of news subjects; 21% on television and 13% on radio. According to the same study, out of five people invited to a debate, only one is a woman. Only 2.7% of the stories focused on women.



Media monitoring of Tunisian media in 2013 by the National Council for Liberties and the Women's Coalition of **Tunisia** found that women constituted 22% of news sources. Women comprised only 9% of subjects in the economic and 12% of subjects in the political topic category compared to 40% of the sources in health and education; and 81% in family and home. *Case study by Dounia Z. Mseffer*

<sup>4</sup> Shivdas, M., *Alternative Assessment of Women and Media based on NGO Reviews of Section J, Beijing Platform of Action* (Women Action, 2000)  
<sup>5</sup> Case study by Dounia Z. Mseffer

Figure 5.4: Function of women sources in Africa media GMMP 2015



Source: Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2015.

Figure 5.4 disaggregates women sources in Africa by their function. It shows that African women are more likely to be interviewed in human interest stories (29%); popular opinion (25%) than as spokespersons or experts (19%).

News coverage plays a significant part in representation and portrayal of women. Women are generally portrayed in a limited number of roles. Sexualised images of women are rife, and women tend to be defined in terms of their physical appearance, not abilities. When they are not being portrayed as sex objects, women are most often shown as victims of violence and homemakers<sup>6</sup>. Although the stereotypes of women as care-givers (such as the selfless mother so popular in advertisements) have more positive connotations, they are nevertheless stereotypes, which certainly do not reflect women's complex experiences and aspirations.

The effect of the roles that women are assigned is to make them unequal to men in almost every way, in almost every country:

- **Economically**, the work that women do in the home is unpaid, and most women's work in the community is voluntary. When women do enter

the “formal economy” they earn, on average, almost half what men earn because “care work” is not as valued in our society as work that involves “control”.

- **Politically**, whether in the home, community or in the nation, women are glaringly absent from decision making. This undermines concepts of equal participation, citizenship, democracy, responsive governance etc.
- **Socially**, women are often minors their whole lives, answerable first to their fathers, then to their husbands, and later in life even to their sons, and their brothers-in-law.



Gender benders: Masai men in a Tanzania market braiding women's hair. Photo: Trevor Davies

<sup>6</sup> Spears, G. and Seydegart, K., *Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2000* (WACC, 2000)  
<sup>7</sup> Children Now, *Boys to Men, Media messages about masculinity* <<https://www.mediate.com/articles/children.cfm>> accessed 13 March 2021

While men usually have more agency than the women in their lives, men's decisions and behaviors are also profoundly shaped by rigid social and cultural expectations related to masculinity. *Boys to Men: Media Messages about Masculinity*<sup>7</sup>, a study published in the USA, highlights the fact that young boys are being bombarded with media images of aggressive, violent males, and raises questions about the media's construction of masculinity. As with

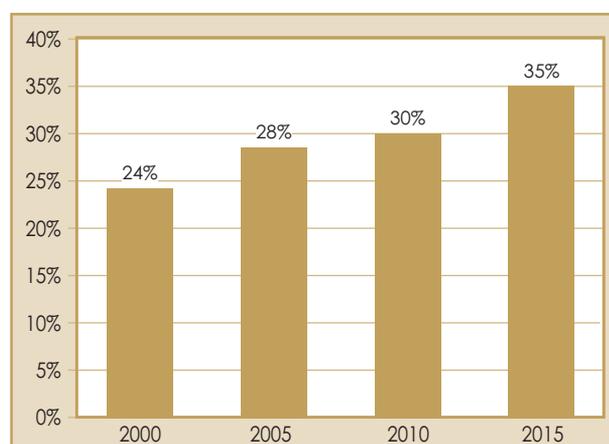
gender stereotypes of women, boys are being offered a very limited definition of what it means to be a man. Broadening the discussion about how **social norms** affect both women and men helps us to better understand the complex ways that rigid gender norms and power relations burden our society, and to more effectively engage men and boys in reflections about inequalities and change.

## Women reporters

Political and especially election reporting has traditionally been a male preserve. The gender imbalance is partly a reflection of inadequate numbers of women reporters in newsrooms. It is important for women reporters to be equally represented in the newsroom and in the coverage of topical issues like elections.

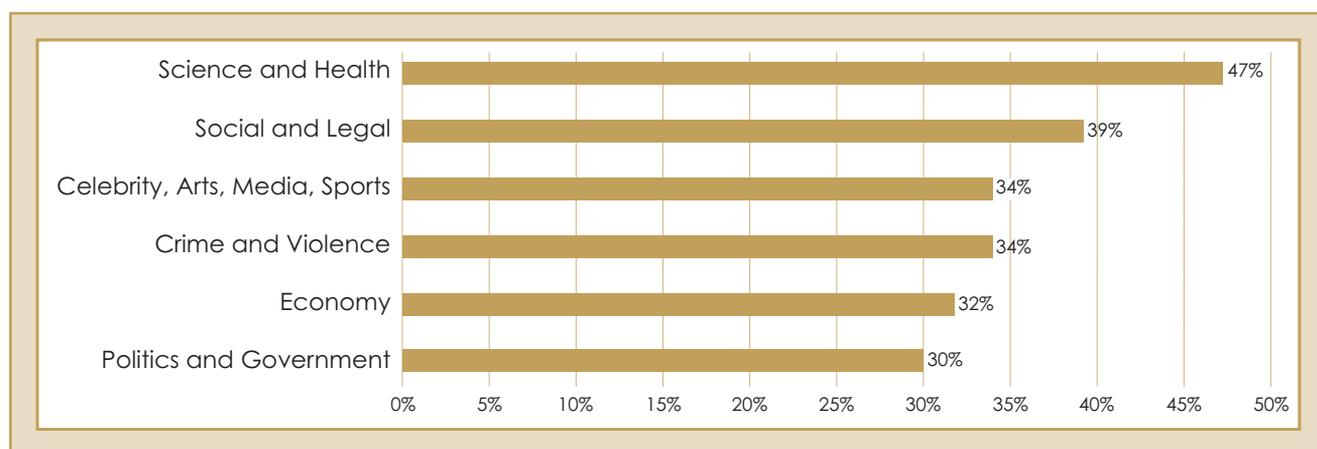
Figure 5.5 tracks women reporters in Africa over the last fifteen years, as reported by the GMMP. Monitors record (where ever possible) whether stories are reported, presented or anchored (depending on the medium) by women or men. The graph shows that the percentage of women reporting the news monitored in the GMMP has increased from 24% to 35% over the last fifteen years. This is a positive trend, though still short of parity.

Figure 5.5: Women reporters in Africa GMMP 2015



Source: Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2015.

Figure 5.6: Women reporters by topic in Africa GMPS 2015



Source: Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2015.

Figure 5.6 disaggregates women reporters in Africa by topic in 2015. This shows that women reporters are most represented in science and health (47%) and least well represented in politics and government (30%). Although having more women reporters does not necessarily translate into having more women sources research suggests that having more women reporters could assist in getting more women talking in the media about their lived experiences. Similarly, having a woman publisher or a woman news manager or editor is not enough to noticeably increase coverage of women. Policies, leadership, capacity building, monitoring and affirming good practise are what makes the difference.

## Tanzania: Women in political and election coverage



Gender Links and the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) conducted six weeks monitoring of the media before, during and after the October 2020 elections. The study, which included 2440 news items, is one of the most comprehensive gender audits of women in political and election coverage and those undertaking this coverage in any African country. As the most current and comprehensive study on women in politics and the news, the data (and the monitoring methodology) may be of interest to other countries holding elections.

Table 5.1: Tanzania 2020 Elections Gender and media monitoring

Area of focus	Sex	
	Female %	Male %
<b>Who speaks in news?</b>		
Overall	18%	78%
<b>Who is seen?</b>		
Images in newspapers and online news	20%	80%
<b>Who is seen in images in stories on leadership politics and governance</b>		
Pre- elections	24%	76%
During elections	23%	77%
Post-election	18%	82%
<b>Who speaks on what?</b>		
Political, Leadership and Governance	13%	85%
Social	18%	79%
Economy	20%	76%
<b>What do women and men politicians speak on</b>		
Economy	11%	87%
Social	15%	83%
Leadership, politics and governance	16%	83%
Gender equality and human rights	24%	54%
Violence Against Women	50%	50%
<b>Who produces the news</b>		
Reporters	39%	61%
Presenters	33%	67%
Reporters on Leadership politics and governance	40%	60%
<b>Women's Leadership and Political Participation focus</b>		
Party support	35%	
Electoral systems	21%	
Fifty-fifty campaign	14%	
<b>Gem Classification</b>		
Gender aware	20%	
Gender blind	69%	

Source: Gender Links and the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) 2020.

Table 5.1 shows that:

- Over the period, women constituted 18% of news sources and 20% of images. Women comprised a slightly higher percentage of sources pre-elections (24%) than during (23%) and post elections (18%). At 13%, women's views and voices were least represented in the political, leadership and governance category.
- Women's views and voices were most heard in the Violence Against Women topic category (50%) and least heard on the economy (11%).
- Women comprised 40% of reporters in the Leadership, Political and Government topic category; 33% of presenters and 39% of reporters overall.
- To the extent media covered WPP, party support (35%) got the most visibility, followed by electoral systems (21%) and the Fifty-fifty campaign (14%).

- Researchers classified the bulk of coverage (69%) as “gender blind” and only 20% as “gender aware”. The remaining 11% of coverage fell in the categories of “subtle” or “blatant” stereotypes.



Journalists interviewing ministers at the Gender and News Summit in 2018.  
Photo: Gender Links

## Women politicians and the media

Most politicians have a love-hate relationship with the media. For women in politics, this relationship is that much more troubled. An IPU study found that only a bare majority of women (53 per cent) said they had good relations with the media; ten per cent had bad relationships and 22 per cent expressed ambivalence.<sup>8</sup>

Stereotypes and controversies most often underpin coverage of women in top positions. Female political leaders face increased media scrutiny, which is attributed to the media's adherence to gender stereotypes that favour men over women in positions of power. More frequently than not, the designer of her clothing, her hairstyle of choice, educational level, and emotional demeanour overshadow a female politician's formation of arguments, opinions on policies, and projections for future endeavours.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Inter Parliamentary Union, *Politics, Women's Insight* (IPU, 2003) pp. 166

<sup>9</sup> McIntosh H., *Women and Politics in the Media in Global Media Journal Canadian Edition* Volume 6, Issue 2, (2013) pp. 99-104 < chrome-extension://oemmdncblldboiebnladdacdbfmadadm/http://gmj-canadianedition.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/v6i2\_mclntosh.pdf accessed 12 March 2021

It is also common for the media to highlight women's failures in leadership since they tend to be fewer in the public domain. Such negative perceptions disadvantage the emergence of more women in leadership positions as they are painted as inadequate. According to Media Monitoring Africa:

Women entering the political sphere provide the news media with a 'problem'. They embody a challenge to masculine authority. They also defy easy categorisation. Therefore, the scrutiny of women's work in our society is closely tied to their traditionally defined roles as 'women'. Their images fit in well with the prevailing cultural perceptions of women. These images also help to maintain the patriarchal structure by inculcating restricted and limited images of women. Women who wish to succeed in politics are forced to define themselves outside of patriarchal definitions of femininity to be taken seriously. Consequently, the media and our society represent these women as unfeminine, as “iron women”, ruthless, going against what is expected of them. These are positive attributes in men, in fact the media frequently call for “strong” leadership, yet when this leadership emerges from women in cabinet and parliament, they are criticised and vilified in the media.<sup>10</sup>



The Cartoon portrays Dr Katheleen Letshabo, a Vice President of the Botswana National Front (BNF) when she ran and lost as President of the party. Dr Letshabo was cartooned as a castrated and bleeding bull, as the cartoonist believed that Presidency is only for men.

Below are some examples of headlines from Kenya, South African and Rwanda in the lead up to elections

- *The Iron Lady of Kalenjii politics does it yet again*<sup>11</sup> - Kenya
- *Xhosa king tells Dlamini-Zuma 'women are too weak to lead'*<sup>12</sup> - South Africa
- *Rwanda: 'It's Not Good for a Girl to Go Into Politics'*<sup>13</sup> - Rwanda

According to the Ethical Journalism Network “media have contributed to gender discrimination and hate speech that is characterised by stereotyping. Therefore, the first yardstick for judging women seeking political office becomes morality, regardless of how male counterparts may behave. The hate speech has been repeatedly used as a weapon of gender-based violence meant to intimidate women into silence.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Media Monitoring Africa, *An analysis of media treatment of women in politics* (MMA,1999)

<sup>11</sup> Nation, 'The Iron Lady of Kalenjii politics does it yet again' <<http://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/The-Iron-Lady-of-Kalenjii-politics-does-it-yet-again-/1064-1722354-12a644c/index.html>>

<sup>12</sup> The Citizen, 'Xhosa king tells Dlamini-Zuma 'women are too weak to lead'', 8 February 2017, <<http://citizen.co.za/news/news-national/1420865/xhosa-king-tells-dlamini-zuma-women-weak-lead/>> accessed 21 March 2021

<sup>13</sup> AllAfrica, 'Rwanda: 'It's Not Good for a Girl to Go Into Politics'', 3 June 2017, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201706050015.html>>

<sup>14</sup> Ethical Journalism Network, *Women in the Crosshairs as Hate Speech Puts African Media under Pressure* <<http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/publications/ethics-in-the-news/hate-speech/africa>> accessed 13 March 2021

## Botswana: Women politicians speak out

During the Botswana situation analysis<sup>15</sup>, several women politicians expressed their frustration with media coverage during the 2019 elections.



Motamma Horatius.

Motamma Horatius, Councillor for Itumeleng ward - Block 3, Gaborone, Botswana, noted: “When I was campaign I was expecting a baby, I decided to put on an oversize dress and not ordinary maternity dresses. The media would write that I am a real cultured woman as I do not put on tight dresses. This was portrayed as a good thing for a politician. After winning primary elections, I went into confinement. This was blown out on social media - that I will not be able to carry out my work as a Councillor, as I will be nursing a child. Media can make or break you in your political career.”<sup>16</sup>

Helen P. Manyaneng, Alliance for Progressives (AP) party Women's League President observed that: “Media coverage during my campaigns was close to zero, whenever I requested for coverage at my rallies, I would be thrown from pillar to post by every media house. I later learnt that they would not cover you unless you pay them some money, even government media. This is why political funding is very important. It would be used for such media coverage, including posters.”

Councillor Keabonye Ntsabane shared her experience of sitting on both sides of the fence; as a media practitioner, now a politician. She said the media could be part of the problem, but is also a big part of the solution. Strategic use of media is key to political success.



Keabonye Ntsabane.

## Media - Part of the solution?

Media can be used to reinforce or challenge stereotypes. UN Women argues that “the



Women media practitioners increasingly perform non-traditional roles.  
Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini

phenomenon of gender stereotypes needs to be countered and fought in multiple areas: in languages and vocabulary, laws, school curriculums and practices, mindsets of people, justice systems, media and education, in different organisations and public authorities, in enterprises, and in individuals.”<sup>17</sup> In 2003, Gender Links conducted a Gender and Media Baseline Study. Three progress studies have since been conducted. In these studies Gender Links has devised a set of criteria for determining what stories should be classified as “gender blind”, and which meet the standards for “gender aware”.

<sup>15</sup> Conducted by Chigedze Chinyepi

<sup>16</sup> Honourable Motamma Horatius - Interview (30.10.2020)

<sup>17</sup> UN Women, *Countering Gender Discrimination and Negative Gender Stereotypes: Effective Policy Responses*. (13 July 2011) Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2011/7/countering-gender-discrimination-and-negative-gender-stereotypes-effective-policy-responses> accessed 13 March 2021

Gender aware reporting	Gender blind/ gender biased reporting
Gender balance of sources (voices)	Lack of gender balance in sources (voices)
Gender neutral language (for example, chairperson rather than chairman)	Gender biased language Lack of awareness of gender dynamics
Awareness of differential impact Fairness in approach to issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No double standards</li> <li>• No moralising</li> <li>• No open prejudice</li> <li>• No ridicule</li> <li>• No placing of blame</li> </ul>	Biased coverage of issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double standards</li> <li>• Moralising e.g. being judgmental</li> <li>• Open discrimination, e.g. women are less intelligent than men</li> <li>• Ridicule, e.g. women in certain situations</li> <li>• Placing blame, e.g. on rape survivors for their dress etc.</li> </ul>
Challenges stereotypes	Perpetuates stereotypes
Gender disaggregated data	Aggregated data

Source: Gender Links Gender and Media Progress Study 2015.

“Gender-aware reporting requires journalists and editors to ensure that an event or issue is told through the voices of both women and men. It requires journalists and editors to seek and use data disaggregated by sex to ensure that background information (context) and analysis reflect both women and men's perspectives. Such an approach would help illustrate how the particular issue, policy or event being reported affects diverse members of a society, including male and female citizens. In-depth reporting and analysis, good research and



a diversity of sources and perspectives bring about gender-aware reporting. Clearly, these characteristics are also the basis of good journalism.”<sup>18</sup>

“Gender-responsive reporting means a journalist must ensure they are not perpetuating stereotypes and must give voice and space to issues affecting women. The best gender-responsive coverage also addresses subjects that have traditionally been sidelined, it portrays women as having something to offer and as more than just objects, and it challenges male stereotypes”.<sup>19</sup>



The **Zambia** Electoral Process Act is one of the few that states that the media should “accurately report election news and not

make any abusive editorial comment incite violence or advocate hatred based on race, ethnicity, tribe, **gender, sex**, political or religious conviction.”<sup>20</sup>

Media can challenge stereotypes in various ways, including the following:

- Seeking more than one source and including sources that are often absent in the news, such as rural women. Although women can equally bring new perspectives to the content produced, women's voices are hardly consulted. Women

are made invisible by the media's omission of their voices and their concerns from the mainstream discussion.

- Portraying women in their non-traditional roles, such as women in leadership positions, and women in traditionally male industries such as mining.

<sup>18</sup> Made P., *Media, Women and Elections: An African Perspective in Media and Elections Handbook*

<sup>19</sup> Gender Links, *Whose News, Whose Views? Gender and Media Progress Study Southern Africa*, (Gender Links, 2015)

<sup>20</sup> Government of Zambia, Electoral Process Act of No 35 of 2016 Section 7(2)(b)

- Selecting stories that are often absent from the news agenda. The media sets the agenda of what becomes news. The media is a business driven by profit, like any other and the major concerns are on the bottom line. Therefore, often-developmental issues are not viewed as

newsworthy. Furthermore, gender equality and women's empowerment are also not viewed as newsworthy.

- Writing opinions and analytical pieces that highlight women's issues and be the informed voice that speaks on behalf of women and girls.

## Examples of gender aware reporting of women in politics



In **South Africa**, the Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) conducted media monitoring of 61 media outlets between March to mid-May 2019, the period before, during and after the most recent South African elections. The MMA analysed 10 796 election-related news items. Only 20% of the sources were women, and almost no coverage was on gender, including GBV. The MMA report entitled *So much choice, but not enough voice?* highlights the need to breakdown the strong patriarchal value systems that prevail in media houses.<sup>21</sup>

The Daily Maverick provided gender balanced and diverse election coverage. On the 18 March 2019 the online publication ran a story entitled *Elections: What do the top three parties say on sexual and reproductive justice?* by Pontsho Pilane. The piece was in stark contrast to other election coverage that focused primarily on political parties. The story highlighted issues such as abortion, sex work and GBV.

The story included citizens voices and ended with this quote: “As I contemplate my vote, as a young black woman in this country, these are the questions I'm asking myself: Are these political parties prioritising access to family planning and abortion? Do they believe sex work is real work? These factors are not only important to me but determine the lives of others who are in worse situations than I am.”

*GroundUp* online news agency covered different angles on elections with several gender aware stories. In a story with the headline *A loan shark has her ID, so she can't vote today*, the agency highlighted the plight of people who cannot vote because they do not have their identity documents. While leaving ID document with loan sharks is illegal the practice is common to guarantee repayment. The story includes interviews with the loan shark, someone who borrowed money and an IEC official. The article points to economic conditions that drive people to take a high interest, unregulated loans.



A loan shark has her ID so she could not vote. Photo: Nombulelo Damba-Hendrik

*TimesLive* produced a series of articles on the election results. As with the others the article entitled *ANC takes commanding lead in election, but support ebbs*, does not reference women's representation or potential numbers of women that parties would field.

<sup>21</sup> Findlay, S. and Dayile, A. *So much voice, but not enough choice: Analysing South African media coverage of the 2019 elections* (MMA, 2019) <[https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019electionsFinal\\_v2.pdf](https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019electionsFinal_v2.pdf)> accessed 13 March 2021



Support for the ANC dropped in the 2019 election.  
 Photo: Sebatso Mosamo/Sunday Times

The articles do not provide sex-disaggregated data and rarely includes interviews with women sources.

The *Sowetan* front page on the 14 May 2019 included a box on the bottom saying *Gender parity headache for ANC*. This is a lead in to the story about the ANC's selection of provincial premiers in seven provinces. The wording of the lead makes gender parity a problem for the ANC as opposed to one of the important guiding principles. The ANC is committed, on paper at least, to gender parity and it is incumbent upon the party to make the commitment a reality.



During the International IDEA media training workshop held in Gaborone, **Botswana** from 18 - 20 November 2020, media practitioners were made aware of the fundamental role they play in providing women in politics with the platform to share their ideas, policies and programmes with the electorates; media allows aspiring politicians to grow their political career and fight stigmatisation on women politicians.



Journalists acknowledged that in some instances, there is little “positive coverage” for women in politics due to the focus of some media house who will be looking at what readers/listeners are most likely to find interesting. Negative publicity of women in politics by media is often the deterrent to women entering into public life. There is a need for more deliberate efforts to train journalists on gender responsive coverage.



Journalist at the Media workshop in Gaborone. Photo: Mboy Maswabi

The 2015 Gender and Media Progress Study found that in **Mauritius** women make up a mere 10% of sources overall and only 8% of sources on politics and Government. However, coverage of the November 2019 national elections showed some progress, with some media ensuring that women were represented.



A notable example was an article on the front page of *L'Express* on 24 October entitled “*Women representation/Mauritius a backward country*”.

The article analysed the political situation in the Rwandan Parliament, which has 61% women, and of Senegal, which has 44% women, comparing them to the situation in Mauritius where only one-fifth of the candidates registered for the November elections were women. The article predicted little progress, considering that eight women were sitting in Parliament during the last term. The article said that even though the main political parties boasted about having 12 women candidates, this is only 20%, which is 30% lower than the 50% target in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. The article described the representation of women in politics as a "failure" and Mauritian society "patriarchal".

Le Mauricien (11 November 2019) published a complementary profile of Joanna Beranger, the daughter of the leader of the MMM Paul Beranger, a young woman parliamentarian entitled "My name has certainly played a part however, I have done a lot in my constituency". Beranger said that

she has given hope to the younger generations and she would like to see more women in parliament and work on women matters, youth, and the environment.

Defi Media Online (13 November 2019) included an article entitled *Race for the Presidency*. This report speculated on whether Françoise Labelle and Maya Hanoomanjee might be nominees for the President of the Republic of Mauritius. The article gave an expose on the political experience of both women. Françoise Labelle was in the seventh position for the 2019 legislative elections in Constituency Vacoas and Floreal, and Maya Hanoomanjee is the Speaker of the National Assembly after losing the 2014 national elections where she competed in Constituency Savanne and Black River. Although neither made it, women's inclusion in the list of potential candidates shows some shift in thinking in the Mauritian media.

## Social (new) media and elections

Information and Communication Technologies have been seen as an opportunity for women to "catch up" with the trends.



A group of Ivorian women being trained in digital communication in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Photo: Augustin Tapé

Social media permits everyone (or at least many people) to broadcast their views (not to mention their prejudices) and co-ordinate their political activities via the internet, without recourse to

traditional outlets. Social media should provide political parties and movements with an important and powerful new communication tool. On the other hand, these new media also brings problems and challenges.

On the one hand, alternative media platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and many others provide an alternative platform for communication in the face of a slim mainstream media. New media is fast becoming a powerful vehicle to advance news and uncensored information. The local is becoming global in an instant by the click of a button. This helps society understand the lived realities of people on the ground in different environments.

Computers and smartphones afford a relatively inexpensive way to receive and impart information, as well as enjoy entertainment and access education that - until a generation ago -

was far beyond the reach of all but the rich. However, the reliability and quality of such information, comment and analysis is often difficult to verify.

Social media represents a challenge to the established media market, which may no longer be the only or even the main source of information or comment. Social media also challenges authoritarian governments.

But the struggles that women have faced offline continue to manifest themselves online. Added to the physical danger is an electronic one, not imagined in earlier surveys: the prevalence of online trolls. International surveys and research have confirmed that women are the most targeted group.

Trolling is online bullying and harassment, which worldwide studies show affects women more than men. A recent UK study of Twitter abuse targeting celebrities by Demos found that “Journalism is the only category where women received more abuse than men, with female journalists and TV news presenters receiving roughly three times as much abuse as their male counterparts.”<sup>22</sup>

Cyber misogyny, expressed via online sexual harassment through stalking and threat of violence, is a genuine psychological - and potentially physical - risk to women journalists' safety. It is also a threat to women's active participation in civil society debate, fostered by news publishers, through online commenting platforms and their social media channels.



Examples from North Africa<sup>23</sup> underscore the fraught relationship between women in politics and social media. In January 2019, the newspaper *Al Akhbar* published a picture of Moroccan MP Amina Maelainine, bareheaded, in T-shirt and jeans in front of the Moulin Rouge in Paris. Maelainine is a member of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), the ruling Islamist party. She is also the seventh president of the region Souss-Massa and seventh vice-president of the Chamber of representatives. The press and social media took Maelainine to the task. Some time afterwards, another picture of her wearing a skirt circulated. The third picture of her posing in front of the Virgin Mary in the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral followed. The images circulated on Islamists platforms hostile to the PJD and on leftist supporters' social media pages. Some criticised the “hypocrisy” of a political activist whose party is known for its conservatism, while others considered this an “odious campaign” against the parliamentarian.



Amina Maelainine in front of the Moulin Rouge in Paris.

Photo: L'Obs

“Globally, I would say that there is a rise in the power of aggressiveness against women who get into politics, mainly on social media,” commented Ouafa Hajji, President of the Socialist International Women in an interview for this study. “The more obvious case is that of Amina Maelainine. Once women become popular or powerful, they are attacked mainly on their private life, which is done to make them submit. Many women prefer to close their account on social media in order not to be harassed.” She says she is very careful when she puts a post on social media.

<sup>22</sup> Demos, *Male celebrities receive more abuse on Twitter than women* <<https://www.demos.co.uk/press-release/demos-male-celebrities-receive-more-abuse-on-twitter-than-women-2/>> accessed 13 March 2021

<sup>23</sup> Case study by Dounia Z. Mseffer

After the announcement of Aïcha Aït Alla's election as a member of the House of Councilors in Morocco, she had to close her account on Facebook because surfers kept on insulting and threatening her. "I have preferred to close my account instead of seeing my private life being splashed everywhere and make my family and electors ashamed. I have absolutely nothing to hide, but on social media, nothing can be controlled. Pictures can be faked, and speeches can be taken out of their context and wrongly interpreted. I refuse that people use my private life against me," she said in an interview for this study.

But some women do not hesitate to use social media to send messages and do advocacy. Samia Achour, a socialist candidate elected in Agdal Riad's ward in Rabat between 2009 and 2015, uses social media to her advantage. She used social media to make citizens aware of cleaning campaigns, the specific hours for the collection of household refuse and the importance of getting the contribution of the youth, the women and the men in having a clean and healthy ward for all. "The youth have adhered to the action plan. We have used social media to make everyone work together for the well-being of the ward. New ideas have been put forward, educative gardens have been launched in colleges and schools, as well as cleaning campaigns and trees and flower planting. It was real interactions with the inhabitants at an early age", she says.



In Algeria, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have shaped and accompanied the protest movement born one year ago in the face of narrowing civic space. Social media has become the platform for popular discontent and means of communication for the protest movement Hirak. Many activists paid the price of their liberty on social media by being prosecuted because of their Facebook posts.

According to a study on social media done by MEDIANET LABS, the research and development cell of MEDIANET, and published in November 2020, women comprise 38% of Facebook users and 30% of those on Twitter.



Nabila Smail.

Nabila Smail, a prominent Algerian lawyer and women's rights activist says that social media has given some visibility to women, particularly young ones, mainly since the Smile Revolution. "We can see more and more

women taking part in webinars, going on television to debate and other television programs whereas before, these platforms were reserved for men. Women were seen on television and in media occasionally, namely during the 8th March. Today the Algerian woman has monopolised the positive elements of the social media. She is very vocal in explanations, animation and denunciation of the political sphere," she noted in an interview for this study. A law condemning harassment on social media has been adopted in Algeria but is rarely applied. "Most of them prefer to close their accounts rather than being harassed," says Smail.



In Tunisia, Fatma Louati, director of MENA Media Monitoring, says: "Tunisian women are very active on social media while they are invisible on social media in Algeria, for instance. In Tunisia, after the revolution and the rise in the Islamists' power, women have accentuated their presence on the Net and express their will to protect their acquired rights in terms of parity. They have made it a personal cause, and nothing frightens them, even if there is a surge of political violence noted in the media and on social media."

*Case study by Dounia Z. Mseffer.*

Efforts by the government to ban access to new social media platforms are unlikely to succeed for technical reasons. Yet authoritarian governments are just as likely to use social media to entrench their control as civil society organisations or opposition forces use it to support liberalisation. Selective disruption of access, for instance, can easily hobble the activities of civil society activists. Governments and others with financial clout can also use social media systematically to spread misinformation and destabilise political opponents.

Furthermore, the new media's interactivity and the ability to comment online (including on the traditional press websites) can prove to be a double-edged sword. Often, much of what is generated is anger and vitriol. This interactivity can provide a vehicle for extremism and intolerance of other people's views and beliefs. Similarly, those who express 'politically incorrect' or even unsavoury ideas can find themselves vilified on social media. 'Trolling' and 'Twitter storms', sometimes instigated or manipulated by powerful interest groups, can corrupt political and other debate.



A group of Ivorian women being trained in digital communication in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Photo: Augustin Tapé



Some women politicians from Côte d'Ivoire are very present on social media.<sup>24</sup> Abidjan-Cocody MP Yasmina Ouegnin has nearly 31,200 followers on twitter. Overall, however, Ivorian women politicians have not yet mastered digital media. Cyber-harassment stops these women from using the social network for their self-promotion, says Carelle Laetitia Goli, lawyer, activist, feminist and political blogger. "The internet users are often ruthless. These women politicians should be trained but also prepared psychologically to be able to cope with all the mockery and stigmatisation."

## Pressure on journalistic standards

The rise of social media is also challenging newspapers and established electronic outlets. As a result, traditional media are increasingly driven by ratings and the search for increased advertising revenue. These are not forthcoming and must engage in major programmes of cost-cutting to remain viable. This has an impact not only on the commercial media but also on public service broadcasters as these seek to justify their subsidies or regulatory protections.

The search for ratings inevitably means that the balance between entertainment and sport, on the one hand, and information and analysis, on the other, suffers. Many countries have experienced a general 'dumbing down' of the media environment.

Frequently, it is journalists who bear the brunt of cuts in the traditional media. This often means, in practice, that those with real knowledge and

<sup>24</sup> Case study by Augustin Tapé

experience are not retained in employment. Simultaneously, pressures of 24/7 media coverage mean that journalists are expected to provide an endless flow of articles and online contributions. Often, this undermines their ability to engage in the in-depth or investigative journalism that is likely to challenge or threaten vested interests. There is little time to think and reflect. In the popular press especially, there is a growing dearth of in-house expertise.

The world is battling a trend of “fake news”. This becomes highly dangerous in unstable areas as people act on misinformation. Journalism is an art of checking and verification of facts however, journalists often negate the verification processes in the news.

The traditional media, and particularly the electronic media, is becoming ever-more

dependent on information provided by social media. Such information may not be adequately assessed for bias (or even truthfulness) before being broadcast. This can, for instance, in conflict zones, fundamentally influence the accepted narrative on which the policies of intervention are based.

This is also transforming the traditional way news is gathered and disseminated. Journalists are using new media in a two-dimensional manner. Firstly, to disseminate content, they produce and secondly find stories and information that can enrich their articles.

Social media is seen as a site where there is a free flow of dissenting views circulating. Election time is particularly seen as a time when such a free flow of information can be deemed a threat to the day's government.

## Gender, media and elections monitoring

Media Monitoring Africa and Gender Links, both based in Johannesburg, have conducted gender and media monitoring of several South African and Southern African elections. GL has devised a holistic approach to gender and elections capacity building and monitoring that includes:

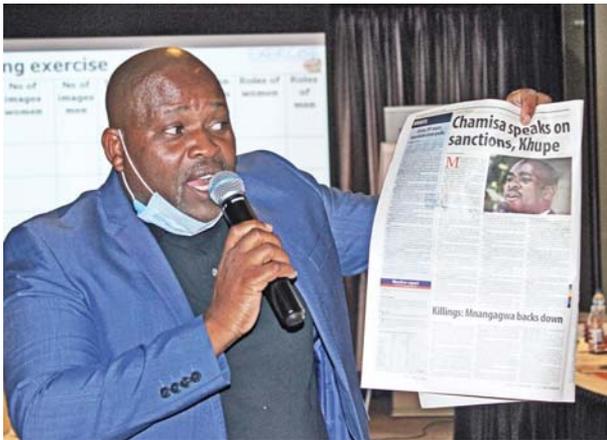
- Capacity building for women aspirants and candidates on campaigning and using media (mainstream, new media and traditional media).

- Gender and elections training for the mainstream media.
- Gender and elections monitoring training for civil society.
- Gender and elections media monitoring for media students.
- Conducting comprehensive gender audits of elections (see checklist at Annex 1) that draws on all the above components.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Women politicians and civil society need to hold the media accountable for the representations that the media produces. Importantly, the media must be forced to recognise and institute a conscious effort to report on women in politics fairly and accurately, where the gender of the

politicians does not impinge in any way on the quality, or quantity of the coverage afforded to them. Gender, elections and media training and monitoring should be factored into all strategies for enhancing gender aware elections. Checks and balances must accompany new media use.



Thabani Mpofu, Media facilitator explaining the gender blind and gender aware concepts during the Zimbabwe Women's Political Participation workshop, Zimbabwe. Photo: Gender Links

## Laws, policies and practices that cover media conduct during elections

- These are generally gender neutral.
- Challenges of commercialization of the politics.
- Compliance and strengthening of the media law.
- Training on gender sensitive reporting (E.G. Uganda).
- Issues of non-coverage, not equal coverage and abuse towards women candidates should be addressed.
- Media should be objective and carry out responsible reporting.
- Media gender policy and sensitization.

- Established code of conduct and penalties enforced towards bias reporting.

## Visibility

- Women candidate profiles to be aired during prime time - not graveyard time/late shows.
- Provisions to be made to women candidates- e.g. Kenya's campaign coverage for women candidates - fully funded.

## Complaints

There are general complaints mechanisms but few cater to women politicians. There is need for:

- The Media Council to monitor and address issues of concern in terms abuse of media, unequal reporting, etc.
- Gender specific guidelines to report complaints pre, during and after elections by women politicians.
- Awareness and sensitization among women politicians when it comes to media rights.

## Gender training for the media

- More resources towards capacity building for the media.
- Training of social media on responsible reporting.

“ Part of the responsibility is with the media and the other with political parties who do not send women to take part in debates unless they think that the questions that will be put concern women. Political parties must send women politician to all the debates. ”

*Professor Fatou Sarr, researcher and sociologist from Senegal*

## Gender training for women in politics

There is need for:

- Allocation of resources towards training of women candidates on the use of media.
- Women candidates to use social media trends to increase their visibility.
- Women politicians to be trained on the strategic use of media to their benefit.
- Capacity building for aspiring women candidates.

## Media commentary and analysis during elections

This can be enhanced through:

- Sensitisation and guidelines established in terms of media analysis of gender.

- Monitoring and awarding/incentives for media houses that are gender sensitive.

## Other recommendations

- Encourage women to be involved in the media coverage/ownership of media houses.
- Women in general should be aware of the strategic use of media to highlight issues and to their benefit.
- Use of women in media as role models.



Media monitoring during a media training workshop in Botswana.

Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini