

# Shattering the glass ceiling

By Ferial Haffajee

Board member; former Chair of SANEF and current Chair of the SANEF Diversity Committee



The Glass Ceiling report, a project of the South African National Editor's Forum (SANEF) has put the spotlight squarely on the gender gaps within the media.

Glass Ceiling One found that despite having a Constitution that entrenches equal rights, "discriminatory practices, structural inequalities, cultural factors, prejudices, patriarchy and sexism are still alive and well in our South African newsrooms. These are clearly prohibiting South Africa's women journalists from realising their potential".

The subsequent audit of women in newsrooms, conducted in collaboration with GL, involved administering a factual questionnaire to the SABC, the Citizen, Kaya FM, Media 24, Primedia, SAPA, the Independent Group of newspapers, Johncom and the Mail and Guardian between September and December 2006.

This study, which covered 4364 employees (or an estimated half of all journalists) found that with 45% women in newsrooms (compared to 33% in a 1995 study) there is a progressive move towards achieving gender balance. But black women, who constitute 46% of the population only account for 18% of newsroom staff (compared to 45% of the population and 28% of newsroom staff in the case of black men and four percent of the population and 28% of newsrooms in the case of white men).

At R184 387 per annum the annual average salary of women in newsrooms is 21% less than the average annual salary of men (R233 737). While the income differential between white men and black men in newsrooms is narrowing, black women earn, on average 25% less than white men in newsrooms.

These salary figures, more than any other, reflect the gender gaps in newsrooms (as one respondent put it: "it's the money, honey!"). They are not due to formal discrimination between women and men, but rather reflect the lower positions that women occupy, and the lower paid areas of work in which they predominate.

Women occupy less than 30% of top management posts and constitute one out of three senior managers in newsrooms. Conversely, they comprise 48% of junior managers and almost 70% of all semi-skilled workers. While black men constituted 16% of top and senior managers in newsrooms in 1999 in 2006 this percentage has increased to 23.5%. On the other hand, black women account for a mere six percent of top and senior management in newsrooms.

While there are now roughly equal proportions of women and men in the editorial divisions of newsrooms, women dominate the presenter and lowest paying administrative categories while men make up 86 percent of

the better paid technical category. Male journalists dominate in all of the hard beats (such as politics, economics, investigative reporting, crime and sport) in which promotion chances are better, while women journalists predominate in the "soft" entertainment, education and general reporting categories.

In the first phase of the study the term "old boys club" and "network" featured repeatedly in explanations for why women are overlooked for more senior posts. None of the media houses in the study could point to specific targets for ensuring gender equality. South Africa now has 42% women in cabinet; 40% in local government and 32% in parliament. Judged by these measures, the media has lagged behind.

SANEF cannot dictate to its members. But it can help to set standards and encourage good practice. A start can be made by getting media houses to engage with the findings. SANEF can also ensure that studies like this are repeated often to measure what progress is being made.



Photo: Trevor Davies

Thandeka Gqubule, Deputy Editor of the Financial Mail, has strong views on glass ceilings in South African newsrooms