

# Who Makes the News? 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project<sup>1</sup>

Lavinia Mohr and Sarah Macharia

## Abstract

The 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) provides a one day snapshot of gender portrayal and the representation of women and men in newspaper, television and radio news simultaneously in 108 countries including 27 African countries. The findings constitute a body of evidence on the current extent of gender sensitivity and gender equity in mainstream news around the world. In combination with data collected every five years since 2005, the GMMP 2010 results allow for comparisons between regions as well as globally, across GMMP research years. This article provides an overview of findings from the monitoring in Africa in comparison with global averages. Comparisons with the findings five years ago reveal the extent of change and lack of change. News media in Africa are behind the global average in many dimensions of gender sensitivity, despite evidence of some change in the last five years.

## Key words:

Global Media Monitoring Project, Gender portrayal, Representation of women  
News media

Sixteen years ago visionaries at the *Women Empowering Communication* conference<sup>2</sup> in Bangkok posed a deceptively simple question. What does a snapshot of gender<sup>3</sup> in one 'ordinary' news day look like?

Behind this question was a need to discover the measure to which news media could be said to be democratic, inclusive and participatory from a gender perspective. The question became the cornerstone of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). The first GMMP captured a picture of gender in the news media of 71 countries in January 1995. Later that year, media monitoring was officially recognised as a tool for change towards gender equality in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted unanimously at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. The BPFA underlined the importance of media to the advancement of women. Section J called for increased participation, and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media; and new technologies of communication; and promotion of a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media. NGOs and media professional associations were encouraged to establish 'media watch groups that can monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women's needs and concerns are properly reflected.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is drawn entirely from *Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2010* global and regional reports and additional data, by permission of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC).

<sup>2</sup> Organised by WACC, Isis International-Manila and International Women's Tribune Centre

<sup>3</sup> The concept 'gender' here refers to the hierarchical power relations between women and men, including understandings of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in a given cultural context. Unlike 'gender' which is relational, 'sex' is biological and where employed here refers to females and males independent of each other.

<sup>4</sup> The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995.. Para. 242 a.

Few participants in the first GMMP<sup>5</sup> foresaw that it would go on to become the world's largest and longest longitudinal research and advocacy initiative on gender in the news media. Every five years since 1995, the GMMP has documented trends in the portrayal of gender and representation of women and men in news media. The decision to carry out a fourth GMMP was made in response to the urging of a wide range of organisations around the world.

Despite the recent proliferation of social media in some regions, news media remain the major and most influential source of information, ideas and opinion for most people around the world. It is a key element of the public and private space in which people, nations and societies live. A nation or society that does not fully know itself cannot respond to its citizens' aspirations. Who and what appears in the news and how people and events are portrayed matters. Who is left out and what is not covered are equally important. The first GMMP, and as will be seen, the fourth GMMP reveal that the world reported in the news is mostly male. In many countries, the cultural underpinnings of gender inequality and discrimination against women are reinforced through the media.

The imperative to focus on news media becomes clear when we consider two facts. The first is that the news is the foremost source of information about issues and events, knowledge that in turn informs communities' understanding of and responses to their world. The second is that the news has the ability to influence policy agendas as issues attain centre-stage in public debate, starkly evident in changes to local and foreign policies during times of humanitarian disasters.

The GMMP findings are a global picture of changes over time in the portrayal and representation of women and men in relation to each other.

The fourth GMMP<sup>6</sup> saw an explosion in participation, including 43 countries that did not take part in the previous GMMP. Participation has significantly expanded in Africa – especially French speaking countries. In southern Africa, participation was coordinated through the Gender and Media Southern Africa network.

On 10 November 2009, teams in countries around the world monitored 1,365 newspapers, radio and television newscasts and internet news websites in 108 countries. They analyzed 17,795 news stories, 21,813 news personnel (announcers, presenters and reporters), and

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<sup>5</sup> The first GMMP was coordinated by the Canadian NGO Media Watch, a 'media watching' pioneer in with support from WACC and others. Erin Research Inc Canada developed the methodology and designed the monitoring tools. The first monitoring day led to the report *Global Media Monitoring: Women's Participation in the News*. The report was launched at the Women's NGO Forum in Beijing in September 1995. Five years on, WACC coordinated the second GMMP with the participation of 70 countries and data analysis by Media Monitoring Project in South Africa. The third GMMP in 2005, also coordinated by WACC with data analysis by Media Monitoring Project, saw the participation of 76 countries.

<sup>6</sup> The fourth GMMP was coordinated by WACC, a global network of communicators promoting communication for social change, in collaboration with data analyst Media Monitoring Africa, and with support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

38,253 people in those stories. The research covers 55% of the world's countries with 82% of the world's population. Monitoring teams included university researchers and their students, media professionals and their associations, and a range of civil society organisations. Internet news monitoring was introduced on a pilot basis for the first time.

## **Methodology**

The project is guided by a commitment to ensure comparable and accurate results from data collected over fifteen years now by thousands of trained volunteer researchers, based on a methodology first employed in the 1995 GMMP and updated every five years since then. All researchers use the same guidelines and coding sheets for monitoring each news story. The data for all news items from each country is collected and analysed using a single database. The analysis provides global statistical results as well as results for each country and for eight regions around the world. A weighting system related to media density is used to derive global results appropriately reflecting both countries such as India with a larger number of media and countries with a smaller number of media such as Lesotho. Further details about the methodology can be found in the GMMP 2010 global report. The monitoring guides, country media density bands and training materials are available in six languages at [www.whomakesthenews.org](http://www.whomakesthenews.org)

It is important to note with respect to comparisons made here between news in Africa over the last five years in that the number of countries, and thus the sample size, increased from 18 in 2005 to 27 in 2010. African countries that returned valid data included in 2010 include Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo Brazzaville, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan (south), Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

## **Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 Findings**

This article covers only a small portion of the findings. Full global and regional reports are available at [www.whomakesthenews.org](http://www.whomakesthenews.org)

News stories were categorised under seven major topic areas and 52 sub-topics. Stories on politics/government (29%), crime/violence (19%) and the economy (18%) dominate the news agenda. Stories in other major topics (science and health; social and legal; crime and violence; celebrity, arts, media, and sports) ranged from 9% to 13% of stories monitored.

### *1. Presence of women and men in the news*

#### Overall presence

Women are still significantly underrepresented and misrepresented in newspaper, radio, television and internet news around the world, despite appreciable change since the project began in 1995. The world portrayed in news media is largely male. The outcome of underrepresentation is a picture of a world where women are largely absent, a picture that is incongruent with reality. News media content has a paucity of women's voices in contrast to men's perspectives, resulting in news that presents a male-centred view of the world.

Only 24% of the people heard or read about in the news are female. In 1995, 17% of people in the news around the world were female. The last 15 years has seen an increase of seven percentage points. The pace of increase in women's presence in the news overall has been 3% every five years from 2000 to 2010, after almost no change from 1995 to 2000. Looking more closely at the breakdowns in major topics of high priority in the news agenda, we find that females are now 19% of persons in stories on politics and government compared to 7% fifteen years ago. They are now 20% of persons in stories on the economy compared to 10% fifteen years ago.

In Africa we do not see the same pace of change. Only 19% of persons in the news are female, unchanged since 2005. The percent of female news subjects is low in important topics such as peace negotiations 7%, human rights 10%, rural economy/agriculture 13%, and development 16%.

#### Occupation of new subjects

The world seen through the news is one where women are not present as active participants in work outside the home in proportion to their real presence. In the world portrayed in the news, men outnumber women in almost all occupational categories. Women outnumber men in only two of 25 occupational categories in the news in Africa: news subjects presented as homemakers (68%) and those presented as unemployed (58%).

#### Experts and ordinary people in the news

As persons interviewed or heard in the news, women remain lodged in the 'ordinary' people categories, in contrast to men who continue to predominate in the 'expert' categories. Expert commentary based on specialist knowledge or expertise is overwhelmingly male. Globally and in Africa, only in every five experts interviewed in the news is female, compared to 17% globally and 19% in Africa five years ago.

Men in the news outnumber women even as providers of popular opinion and information based on personal experience. Women are, however, inching closer to parity as people providing popular opinion. The provider of popular opinion is assumed to reflect views of the 'ordinary citizen' through a street interview or a *vox populi* segment where it is implied that the person's point of view is shared by a wider group of people. Globally, 44% of persons providing popular opinion in news stories are female compared to 34% in 2005. This is a significant change. Turning to Africa, the situation is less encouraging: women were 33% of interviewees providing popular opinion, a drop from 38% five years ago.

Persons in the news providing personal experience speak based on individual experience where the comment is not necessarily meant to reflect the views of a wider group. 38% of persons providing personal experience in news stories are female compared to 31% five years ago. This is also a significant change. In African news, women comprised 34% of those providing personal experience, a dramatic increase compared to 14% five years ago. Here, African news stories are giving more weight to female perspectives.

#### News focus on women

Globally, 13% of news stories focus centrally on women, an increase of three percentage points since 2005. This is a statistically significant change from the 10% found in the 2005 research. In three of the major topics there is no improvement since 2005 in news focusing centrally on women. The exceptions are 'politics/government' where women are now central in 13% of stories compared to 8% in 2005; in 'science/health' 16% in 2010 from 6% five years ago, and in stories on 'economy' 11% now from 3% five years ago.

In Africa, only 10% of news stories focus centrally on women, unchanged since 2005. Topic areas in which less than 10% of stories focus centrally on women include poverty, housing, social welfare; sports; human rights; development issues; legal system, judicial system, and legislation including family, property and inheritance law; education; labour issues; and the rural economy.

## *2. Differential treatment of women and men in news stories.*

Women and men in news stories are often treated differently, displaying significant gender bias. This was found by looking at identification of news subjects by age and family status, and portrayal of news subjects as 'victim' or 'survivor' (not detailed here due to lack of space). The study also looked more broadly at gender stereotypes.

### Identification by age and family status

The tendency to identify women based on their physical attributes persists. Globally, journalists are almost twice as likely to mention the ages of their female news subjects as they are to mention the ages of their male news subjects. The tendency is identical in African news, where age is mentioned for 16% female news subjects in contrast to only 8% for male news subjects.

Identifying women by their family status and at the same time playing down their roles in their communities masks women's other identities as independent, autonomous beings active participants in the wider society beyond the home. In Africa, the disparity in identification of news subjects by family status persists but appears to be decreasing. Female news subjects are almost three times as likely as male news subjects to be identified by family status: 11% vs 4%. In 2005, it was 19% vs 5%.

## *3. Gender equality/inequality in the news*

In Africa, five percent of news stories were found to contain discussion or evoke issues of gender (in)equality. This is slightly below the six percent global average, and is an increase of one percentage point from 2005. The low incidence of discussion or mention of gender (in)equality issues implies enormous missed opportunities in the news to contribute to raising public awareness and stirring debate on inequality.

## *4. Gender stereotypes*

Many reports use language and images that reinforce gender stereotypes. News media in all regions have made progress, albeit very modest, in outputting stories that clearly challenge stereotypes. In Africa, 5% of news stories challenge gender stereotypes, compared to 6% globally and compared to 3% in Africa five years ago. News stories on HIV and AIDS were the

most likely to challenge gender stereotypes at 11%. This finding probably reflects the sustained effort to bring gender sensitivity into reporting on this topic, and suggests that such efforts can be effective. However, the majority of African news stories were found to reinforce gender stereotypes, putting African news above the global average of 46%. Stories on domestic policies, economic policies and peace were found to reinforce gender stereotypes more frequently than other story topics.

### *5. Delivering the news*

#### Reporting

In Africa today, female reporters are responsible for 30% of stories reported in radio, television and newspapers compared to 28% five years ago. Female reporters are responsible for 24% of newspaper stories, 38% of radio stories and 36% of television stories. In Africa as well as globally, stories by male reporters continue to exceed those by female reporters in all topics. Science and health is the major topic in Africa with the highest proportion of female reporters at 45%. Females report 26% of stories on economics, 29% of stories on politics and 38% of stories on crime and violence.

News items by women reporters are somewhat more likely to be more responsive to gender concerns than stories by their male colleagues. Globally as well as in Africa, stories by female reporters contain more female subjects than stories by male reporters. This trend has persisted over the past 10 years. Female reporters contribute 42% of the stories in Africa in which women are central despite reporting only 30% of the stories. Stories by female reporters are less likely to reinforce gender stereotypes. In Africa, stories by female reporters challenge gender stereotypes over two times more than those by their male colleagues. In the region as well, 7% of stories by female reporters highlight gender equality or inequality issues, in contrast to only 4% of stories by male reporters.

### *6. Internet news*

Gender bias in Internet news is similar and in some respects even more intense than that found in the traditional news media. Findings suggest that the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in traditional news media has been carried over into the virtual news world.

### **Moving towards change**

The marginalisation of women's voices is increasingly being recognised a key challenge to freedom of expression. In February 2010, the four special rapporteurs on freedom of expression appointed by the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe jointly identified 10 key challenges to freedom of expression in the next decade. Discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression for women and other marginalised groups is one of the ten key challenges they identified: "...historically disadvantaged groups including women... continue to struggle to have their voices heard and to access information of relevance to them." The four special rapporteurs on freedom of expression are particularly concerned about the lack of self-regulatory measures to address "Inadequate coverage by the media . . . of issues of relevance to historically disadvantaged groups; [and] the prevalence of

stereotypical or derogatory information about historically disadvantaged groups.” (*Tenth Anniversary Declaration: Ten Key Challenges to Freedom of Expression in the Next Decade*)

Journalism and the media face many challenges in a rapidly changing world where new and traditional media are converging with unpredictable consequences. High ethical and professional standards and editorial policies founded on enlightened self-interest will certainly be among the factors that determine the future of the journalistic profession and the traditional news media. The future of professional journalism is linked to the search for quality journalism. Media decision makers and media owners have much to gain by reaching out to potential new audiences that, in many parts of the world, are composed of women who are presently underserved.

Media practitioners are contributing to change. In 2008, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) launched The Ethical Journalism Initiative, a global campaign to support and strengthen quality in journalism.<sup>7</sup> The IFJ proactively advocates that gender equality be taken seriously within newsrooms, journalists unions and journalistic practice. According to the IFJ’s General Secretary, Aidan White, “Fair gender portrayal is a professional and ethical aspiration, similar to respect for accuracy, fairness and honesty.”<sup>8</sup>

Fair gender portrayal and representation of women is a mark of high professional and ethical standards in journalism, similar to accuracy, balance and honesty. News mirrors the world more accurately when representation of women and men is balanced. Good journalism includes fair gender portrayal. Consideration of gender is a professional imperative that should be integrated into the daily journalistic endeavour: exploration of gender dimensions of a news issue produces balanced, accurate, incisive and stimulating news reports. Some exemplary news stories demonstrate how giving equal weight to female and male voices and highlighting often hidden gender dimensions of topics in the news makes a quality news report.

The 2010 GMMP findings show that there is still a long way to go. Change is occurring in some important areas, while in others progress remains slow or has even been eroded. Yet in each dimension of news measured by the GMMP, instances of exemplary journalism do exist. These instances show how gender-balanced, gender-aware journalism is not only compatible with but is intrinsic to high quality journalism.

The findings confirm the continuing need for concerted dialogue and action among advocates for women’s advancement, civil society groups concerned with human development, media users, media professionals, media decision makers and owners, media training institutions, media development agencies, and where appropriate and relevant, public decision makers. Action is needed in media policies and accountability; organisational targets and in-house monitoring; sensitisation and training of journalists and editors; the expansion of media monitoring, and improving gender balance in the media industry to achieve a more gender-sensitive and balanced work floor. The GMMP global report contains a plan of action to

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<sup>7</sup> See the initiative’s website [www.ethicaljournalisminitiative.org](http://www.ethicaljournalisminitiative.org)

<sup>8</sup> *Getting the Balance Right: Gender Equality in Journalism*, International Federation of Journalists, 2009

accelerate the pace of change in areas of media policy and practice that constrain advancement towards more gender-just news media.

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Lavinia Mohr is the Director of Programmes for the World Association for Christian Communication, a global network of communicators promoting communication for social change.

Sarah Macharia is Programme Manager for Media and Gender Justice at the World Association for Christian Communication and coordinator of the Global Media Monitoring Project.

Lavinia Mohr  
World Association for Christian Communication  
Tel. +1 416 691 1999 x 223  
[LM@waccglobal.org](mailto:LM@waccglobal.org)  
Toronto, Canada

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