

Women Media Practitioners: The Endangered Stakeholders in the Kenyan Media Arena

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Abstract

Knowledge and information are necessary bonding agents for human development and progress. Those with greater capacity to create, access and disseminate knowledge and information ultimately gain a competitive edge in society. The Media is an organ charged with the responsibility for educating, entertaining and informing society. Media professionals in Africa and Kenya in particular, face challenges in the course of their work. Women media practitioners face unique challenges in a field that is largely dominated by men. These challenges have resulted in gender abuse and violation of media ethics. The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by women media practitioners in Kenya, with a view to suggesting lasting solutions to these problems. The specific objectives were to: identify the media specializations in Kenya; identify specific media professions in which women have ventured; identify media professions that are largely male-dominated; assess the performance of women media practitioners in comparison to their male counterparts; identify challenges faced by women media practitioners and; suggest possible solutions to these challenges. The study was qualitative in nature and questionnaires were administered to purposively selected respondents. The target population constituted female news anchors, reporters, program producers, editors and technical operators. The study hopes to aid in empowering women media practitioners in order to enable them go beyond the glass ceiling in the world of media. It will also aid in streamlining the media fraternity in Kenya.

Keywords: Media Practitioner, Gender, Media Ethics, Media Arena, Women.

1. Introduction

“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.” Swami Vivekananda

Crumb et al. (2012) says that media basically refers to various means of communication, for example, television, radio, and newspapers. The term can also be used as a collective noun for the press or news reporting agencies. In the computer world, "media" is also used as a collective noun, but refers to different types of data storage options. The media has been tasked with various roles among them: agenda setting, upholding democracy, curbing corruption, informing the public of various happenings, championing for social justice, good governance and human rights among others.

Like in most professions, women have struck out boldly in the media too, beating a path, which is both impressive and inspiring. The last five years have seen them pouring out into the mainstream, acquiring hitherto unattainable positions and proving their mettle, be it in the print or the television media. Evidently, women have become indispensable in the field of media and their role in the media arena cannot therefore be under estimated (Ray, 2008).

Ibrahim (2012) voices the concern that in the current dynamic environment, women in media have a large responsibility in not only changing attitude towards women but also shaping public opinion. With women holding responsible positions in newspapers as well as electronic media, their competency should extend to a wider area and range of issues. More importantly, a woman in the mass media industry is expected to show more sensitivity to issues relating to women and to provide more meaningful insights and perspectives. The primary concern of this paper is to point out these problems and give solutions that may be adopted to bring positive change in the media arena.

1.1 Role of the Media in Society

Ray (2008) in his speech on the role of the media, states that the media plays a very significant role in society today. This can be attested from the shows we watch on TV, the music we listen to on the radio, to the books, magazines, and newspapers we read each day”. He further explains that the media has a critical role to inform, educate and entertain. Without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but also from governments, law-makers, and neighboring towns and cities. Without a wide array of

information, people's opinions and views would be limited and their impressions and conclusions of the world around them stunted.

Historically, the most common form of the distribution of information was word of mouth, which is still one of the most powerful tools in the sharing of information today. Technology has allowed for this exchange of information to take place in an instant, forging the way for bigger and better media houses with the instant access to information, for example the social media.

Media workers are in essence interpreters of information. Journalists provide the five basic areas of information: Who, what, where, why, and how. In this way, the media keeps us focused on the issues that matter in a surveillance-type way. Some aspects of media surveillance include the latest stock report, sports scores, entertainment news, progress and results of an election, and so forth.

While the media has historically been viewed as being overly aggressive and insatiable in their plight for the latest and hottest news, their watchdog-type function is essential in a democratic society where people MUST know what their governments are doing. The media has the capacity to hold governments accountable, forcing them to explain their actions and decisions, all of which affect the people they represent. In a democratic society, people should know all their options if they are to govern themselves and the media is a vehicle for the dissemination of such information.

Finally, one of the most powerful strengths the media has in any society is the ability to effect change, both on a social and governmental level.

1.2 Overview of Women and Media

All over the world, women have gradually started taking up positions in various media houses worldwide. This walk has however not been easy for most women, but as Japanese wisely said, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

A decade ago, African women had reason to expect change following a much-heralded global conference that set ambitious targets to transform the lives of women across the world. The year 2012 marks the 12th anniversary of that milestone event, the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in 1985. Like their counterparts elsewhere, Kenyan women are taking stock of progress and asking to what extent promised reforms have been implemented. They are also examining why progress has been limited in many countries and are seeking ways to overcome the obstacles. Among those in the fore front of this transformation are women in the media arena who are tasked with the responsibility of continually educating and informing the masses on various societal issues.

Preliminary brief on the online discussion: Women and the Media Conducted by the UN Department of Public Information 1 – 28 February 2010 highlighted the following gender issues that African women have been struggling to deal with; widespread poverty as well as heavy labour burdens, women in Africa continue to be denied an education, often the only ticket out of poverty and disparities between girls and boys start in primary school and the differences widen up through the entire educational system. ([Forum on challenges Faced by Women in Media](#)).

1.3 Challenges of Women in the Media

The existence of gender inequalities has continued to undermine human and social development for many decades. Eliminating gender inequality to allow for equal opportunities in all industries including the media is one of the biggest challenges facing the world today. Although globally women media practitioners are making significant contribution as workers in the media sector, they are faced with numerous challenges while pursuing their careers in the sector (Mugwe, 2009).

According to Ibrahim (2012), Male dominance, family restrictions, an unfavorable workplace environment, lack of training facilities, lack of security and inflexible working hours are among the main reasons why many women quit journalism. "Very few women journalists make it to the top; it's still mostly men," Ibrahim (2012).

Lukalo-Owino et al. (2006) specifically highlights some of the challenges faced by women in the media arena as follows:

- 1) Issues of gender within the profession in terms of recruitment, training and retention of women journalists, and gender perspectives on media content have not been fully addressed. It is crucial to address women's reproductive rights within media institutions;
- 2) Sexual harassment and coercion of female journalists is a common complaint in all countries of the region;
- 3) Culture and laws in some countries work against women.
- 4) Failure by the media to implement the human resource and sexual harassment policies even where these exist.

A lot of women in the media fraternity have lost their lives, been kidnapped, and raped, to mention but a few. Some have to a large extent been traumatized by some of the violent crimes they cover, and without

adequate counseling this trauma can and will affect their lives. In Afghanistan, KABUL, Reuters (2011) reported that "... - Farida Nekzad has faced threats of kidnapping, acid attacks and a plot to blow up her apartment since she founded her first news agency in Afghanistan seven years ago. Members of the Taliban e-mailed some of the warnings; others arrived over the phone. One caller warned she would be murdered and disfigured so horrendously that her family would not be able to recognize her body. But the mother of one, whose most recent project is a news agency that spearheads coverage of the problems that Afghan women face, is undeterred. She leads Wakht's coverage on domestic violence, the bartering of girls and women between families and the widespread but illegal practice of forced marriages. Though common across the country, such stories rarely make the mainstream media, despite funding for many outlets coming from Western donors who are keen to promote women's rights. Wakht's reporters have in the past been lured away by rivals with big cash offers, in what Nekzad sees as an attempt by more conservative factions of society to silence the agency. "We are also ignored," Nekzad said, adding that Wakht employees are often not invited to events, and must ask journalists from other outlets about what is taking place...."

Another challenge that women face in the media industry is the inability to hold senior positions in media organizations. In a forum discussion recorded by Ferris-Rotman (2011), *Afghanistan: Women in Media Reveal Risks & Challenges*, the speakers highlighted factors that prevented women from reaching senior positions in media organizations such as: occupational segregation; slower career progression; discrimination; lack of preparedness; lack of negotiating skills and lack of support system. Further, the discussion established that in sharing their experiences, participants from developed and developing countries alike indicated slow change in the situation in respect to gender equality in media organizations.

They noted that men were still the ones overwhelmingly holding key positions in media organizations and bodies governing media. This was "automatically reflected in the editorial choices a newspaper or other medium makes," as one participant stated. Another participant noted that she could not "think of any policies meant to promote women's participation in the media" in her country (Ferris-Rotman, 2011).

Regarding representation of women at decision making levels in media organizations and in boards governing media, Alison Clarke, Founder and co-editor of Women's Views on News, United Kingdom, indicated that "there are very few senior women in the newspaper field in the UK. There are a number of women editors of magazines but very few in more senior areas. This is all completely anecdotal as I'm not sure of the exact numbers but I would say that 95% of newspaper editors are men. As you go up the hierarchy there are fewer and fewer women." All participants acknowledged that a great number of women were mainly working at the low and middle levels.

2. Methodology

Qualitative techniques were employed in data collection using face-to-face interviews and documentary review. The study population consisted of 30, out of which a study sample size of 20 respondents (66.6%) was selected purposively. The study was a cross-sectional descriptive survey based on the four major media houses in Eldoret town. The study was qualitative in nature and questionnaires were administered to purposively selected twenty (20) respondents. The target population comprised of women media practitioners in the four media houses working as news anchors, reporters, program producers, editors and technical operators. The main data collection tool was an interview schedule. Each interview lasted for 25-30 minutes. The data collected was analyzed, interpreted and presented qualitatively. The table below shows the population and sample of the study.

Table 1: Study Population and Sample Size (N=50)

Participants	Population	Sample	Percentage (%)
Nation Media Group	12	10	83.3
SAYARE	13	10	76.9
Bibilia Husema	15	10	53.3
Fish FM	14	10	66.6
TOTAL	50	40	80

3. Results and Discussion

The response rate was very good represented by 100% (all 40) questionnaires that were administered. This was attributed to the small number of the population and sample ultimately selected. Gender distribution of respondents who participated in the study was as captured below.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

AGE	MALE	FEMALE
20-30	7	7
31-40	11	11
41-50	2	2
TOTAL	20	20

From the above table, a total of 10 female and 10 male media practitioners participated in the study. This equal gender balance was necessary to enable comparisons to be undertaken in the study.

3.1 Media specializations in Kenya

The study identified the following on the above theme:

- i. TV/Radio Programming; Duties include programme planning and organizing interviews with guests.
- ii. Radio News production/Presenters; Duties include News planning, chairing planning meetings, assigning field reporters, coordinating the day's news gathering and dissemination, coming up with a news running order to guide news presenters on air, Writing/Editing, and voicing stories; news presentation.
- iii. Video editing for news; Duties include Editing video clips for news and programs, compiling and filing news clips for future reference, transmission control, editing/censoring programs; quality control of programs, preparation of a daily transmission schedule.
- iv. TV/Radio Anchors/Reporters; Duties include News gathering, going to the field, interviewing news sources, coming up with creative ideas, scripting, news stories/features writing, editing and voicing stories.
- v. Studio Technical Operators; Duties include Compilation of the daily transmission schedule, transmission of all programmes, promotions and commercials as scheduled, sound operation of all live production, vision mixer and camera operation, studio lighting and word spacing transmission of outside broadcasts.
- vi. News Directors; Duties include News planning, organizing/briefing of the news crew, come up with new properties within news, direct news.
- vii. Camera Correspondents; Duties include, Coming up with relevant video footage, Editing, and Interviewing news sources (respondents).

3.2 Specific media professions in which women have ventured

Table 3: Media professions in which women have ventured

MEDIA PROFESSION	NO. OF WOMEN	% SAMPLE
Newspaper	5	25
Magazine Writing	10	50
TV/Radio Programming	7	35
News production/Presenters	12	60
Editing (including video)	10	50
TV/Radio Anchors/Reporters	14	70
Studio Technical Operators	6	30
News Directors	5	25
Camera Correspondents	8	40

The study further established that women have ventured in to the above professionals for different reasons as discussed below:

- 1) Newspaper writing – Many of the respondents shied away from writing articles for newspapers saying that this required serious thinking which they felt was time consuming. Only 5 (25%) of the female respondents indicated that they engaged in writing articles for newspapers.
- 2) News Presenters – This involves a lot of entertainment. Among the women interviewed, 12 (60%) of the respondents were working as news anchors/reporters said they preferred this as opposed to being in back office/ behind-the-scenes. The respondents were of the view that women are more creative than men when it comes to broadcasting. Some opined that naturally, women tell stories better as compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore they felt that women are better communicators since they can express themselves more freely.
- 3) TV/Radio reporters – 14 (70%) of the female respondents were engaged TV and/or radio reporting. They said that it was less time involving e.g. radio TV news presenters' work in shifts of not more than five hours.
- 4) Magazines writing – 10 female respondents (50%) said they preferred lifestyle and fashion stories because they found them interesting.
- 5) Editing – 10 (50%) of the respondents interviewed felt that editing of stories was less involving since this entailed refining what has already been captured.
- 6) News Directors – Out of the 20 respondents, only 5 (25%) engaged news directing activities, with most of

the female respondents indicating they did not like working behind the scenes. The same reason was cited by the respondents for shying away from studio technical operator and camera work.

3.3 Media professions largely dominated by men

Table 4: Media professions largely dominated by men

MEDIA PROFESSION	NO. OF MEN	NO. OF WOMEN
Newspaper writing	7	4
TV/Radio Programming	15	6
Technical Operators	14	3
Studio Directors	12	2
Camera Correspondents	10	4
Investigative Journalism	4	1
Sports Reporting	8	Nil

From the table above a good number of media fields are dominated by men.

3.4 Performance of women media practitioners in comparison to their male counterparts

Women media practitioners venture more into the professions that involve more of office work than field activities e.g. video production as indicated below:

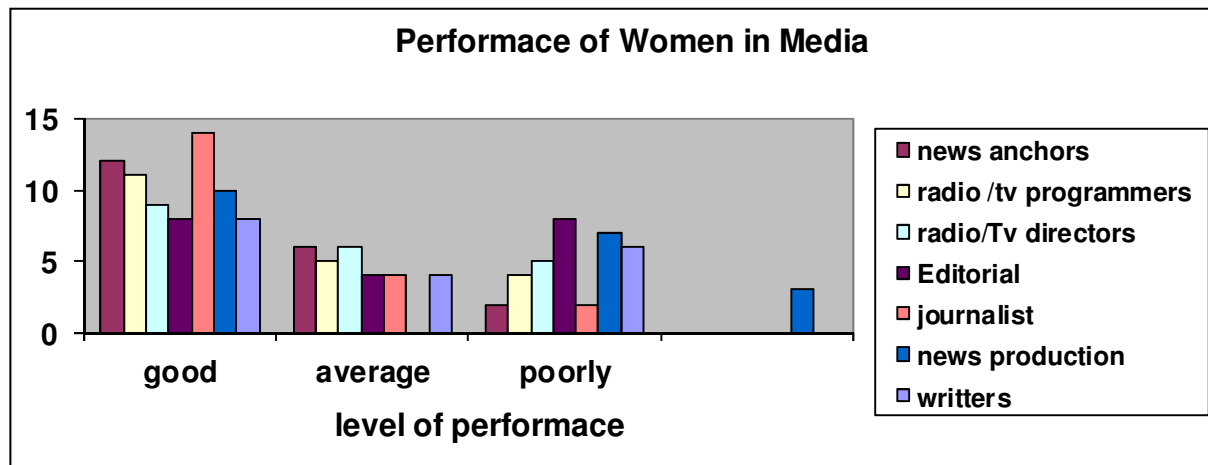


Figure 1: Performance of Women in Media

From the graph above, women are depicted as having performed a lot more in to journalism and radio/TV programming. It was noted that as regard to news anchoring most station had normally two news anchors a male and a female. Furthermore their performance was similar to men. However women feared venturing in to investigative journalism related to crime, drugs, war among others such as the famous 'Jicho Pevu' series aired by Kenya television networks (KTN). They cited that most journalism undertaking such series were often threatened.

The study revealed that women performed poorly in editorial because it was so involving and hence demanding in terms of time. The respondents cited that most of them had families that also needed their utmost attention. According to Ibrahim (2012), the media is very powerful and there is intense competition in the industry to be the best. Those who can rise to the challenge will progress. But it is especially difficult for senior female journalists because of family commitments and attitudes towards them.

3.5 Challenges faced by women media practitioners

The study further sought to identify the challenges faced by women in the media. The following was reported:

- 1) Difficulty in convincing guests to participate in live talk shows. This was attributed to the attitude held by many men who feel that they should not expose their personal issues to women.
- 2) Some guests fail to turn up for shows despite having confirmed attendance. This often land's the organizers in trouble as they are blamed by the media owners;
- 3) Men look down upon women media practitioners – when deadlines are not met, some guests say they would have responded if it were a man among other reasons. Some people view women as inferior as opposed to their male counter parts.
- 4) Male chauvinism – male counterparts feel that females are not able to lead or head. On many occasions, they have been forced to fight stereotypes on the jobs women take in comparison to men.

- 5) News sources seeking sexual favors from women. Women media practitioners fear to approach male news sources because of fear of perceived sexual favors.
- 6) Family responsibilities – pregnancy and maternity leave affect work. This may cause family conflicts and this directly or indirectly affects work performance of women in the media industry. Furthermore, women suffer fatigue as a result of home responsibilities resulting in poor work output
- 7) Mood swings; generally women are perceived to have various hormonal changes which affects their moods.

3.6 Possible Solutions to these challenges

The study further sought to identify possible solutions to the numerous challenges faced by women in the media arena. The respondents interviewed voiced the following as possible remedies:

1. Women need to be determined in their work. They should not shy away from serious work;
2. Women should have self-respect while carrying out their professional duties. For example, they should not allow themselves to give in to sexual favors in exchange for news stories
3. Women should take an affirmative action on the various issues that affect them. For example, the Association for Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) should step up its efforts in championing for the rights of women media professionals;
4. The media owners should be sensitized on the capability of women to hold key positions in the media houses;
5. Workplace support from male colleagues;
6. Media houses should give special consideration to women media professionals. They should ensure their welfare is taken in to;
7. Media houses should create awareness on importance of supporting women morally, spiritually and financially when they choose to venture into male dominated professions.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined the various specialties that women in media have ventured in to and the challenges they face in their day to day work. The study noted that women have been faced with the various challenges that include: discrimination by their male counterparts, sexual harassment, demanding family commitments and inflexible working hours. There is need in Kenya to mobilize women and provide them with equal opportunities for intensive training, thus empowering them with professional skills so that they can stand on their feet in mainstream media.

5. Recommendations

In view of the above findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Development of Gender Policy and guidelines – There is need for media managers and practitioners to jointly develop policies and guidelines which encourage and promote equal participation in the media.
2. The study recommends for media owners and policy makers to develop practical approaches to address gender related issues and concerns at all levels in the media industry.
3. Of equal importance are issues of training to bridge the gender gap and career development in media houses. Training is not just about professional training but training in gender and its different components targeting media practitioners. Gender training should be undertaken at all levels and should be evaluated in terms of programmes and institutional culture and practices.
4. Last but not least, media houses should advocate for the rights of female media practitioners to practice without fear of repression. This would enable women practitioners to operate optimally in the media industry.

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