



The Missing Perspectives of Women in News

A report on women's under-representation in news media;
on their continual marginalization in news coverage
and on the under-reported issue of gender inequality

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Project background, objectives and approach

To elevate the issue of gender equality in the news media and in support of the Generation Equality Forum¹, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation commissioned Luba Kassova, director of international audience strategy consultancy AKAS Ltd, to research the performance of a set of gender equality indicators and provide benchmarks for them. These benchmarks could then be used by news providers globally **to drive gender equality within their institutions** at the level of organizational resources, newsgathering and news coverage.



The **four key indicators** that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation asked Luba Kassova and AKAS to examine were:

1. Gender diversity in the workplace and in leadership (organizational resources)
2. Women as sources of news expertise (newsgathering)
3. News stories leading with women protagonists (news outputs)
4. Coverage of gender equality issues (news outputs)



Drawing on their experience gained across a wide range of sectors including news, media, communications, international development, strategy and market research, Luba Kassova and the AKAS team adopted a **multi-phase, multi-disciplinary and multi-perspective research approach** to address the business objective. AKAS drew together the four indicators into a news production, consumption, and impacts framework that can be used by any news provider. This framework incorporates **the perspectives of different stakeholder groups** such as academics, media organizations, the public in different countries, journalists, influencers and decision makers. The research and insights have been focused on **six countries**: India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK and the US.



In order to meet the business objective, AKAS used the following **research methods**:

1. A multi-discipline literature review of 2,286 academic articles, spanning academic arguments and conclusions from recent decades, which AKAS narrowed down to the 230 most cited articles and reviewed the 30 most insightful ones in greater depth
2. News content analysis of 11,913 publications and 56.9 million stories from 2019 for the gender equality indicator, and of 80 publications for the protagonists and experts indicators, delivered by Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, a non-profit media analysis research group out of the MIT Media Lab
3. Google Trends analysis of the public's searches for 'International Women's Day' in the six analyzed countries, carried out by AKAS between 2018 and 2020
4. Analysis of 74 single-question public facing surveys commissioned by AKAS using Google Surveys during 2020
5. Analysis of multi-country surveys of the public including from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, The Pew Research Center, Ipsos, and the World Values Survey spanning the period between 2005 and 2020
6. Analysis of survey data/reports about journalists provided by the International Center for Journalists, the Worlds of Journalism Study, American Society of News Editors, *Glass Ceiling Report*, UN Women, Women's Media Center, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Census, UK Census, UK Labour Force Survey, Columbia Journalism Review, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and Journalists for Christ International Outreach from 2000 to 2020
7. Analysis of survey data from opinion leaders provided by the World Bank Group's *Country Opinion Surveys* between 2015 and 2019
8. Analysis of gender-related indices from the World Economic Forum, United Nations Development Programme, Equality Measures 2030, and International IDEA
9. Review of case studies of successes anchored in behavioral science principles



One of the significant challenges in producing this report has been understanding the trends in gender equality in the news given the **significant gaps in longitudinal and cross-country data**. The report has had to patch together data from a large range of sources in an

¹ A global gathering for gender equality, convened by UN Women and co-chaired by France and Mexico, with the leadership and partnership of civil society

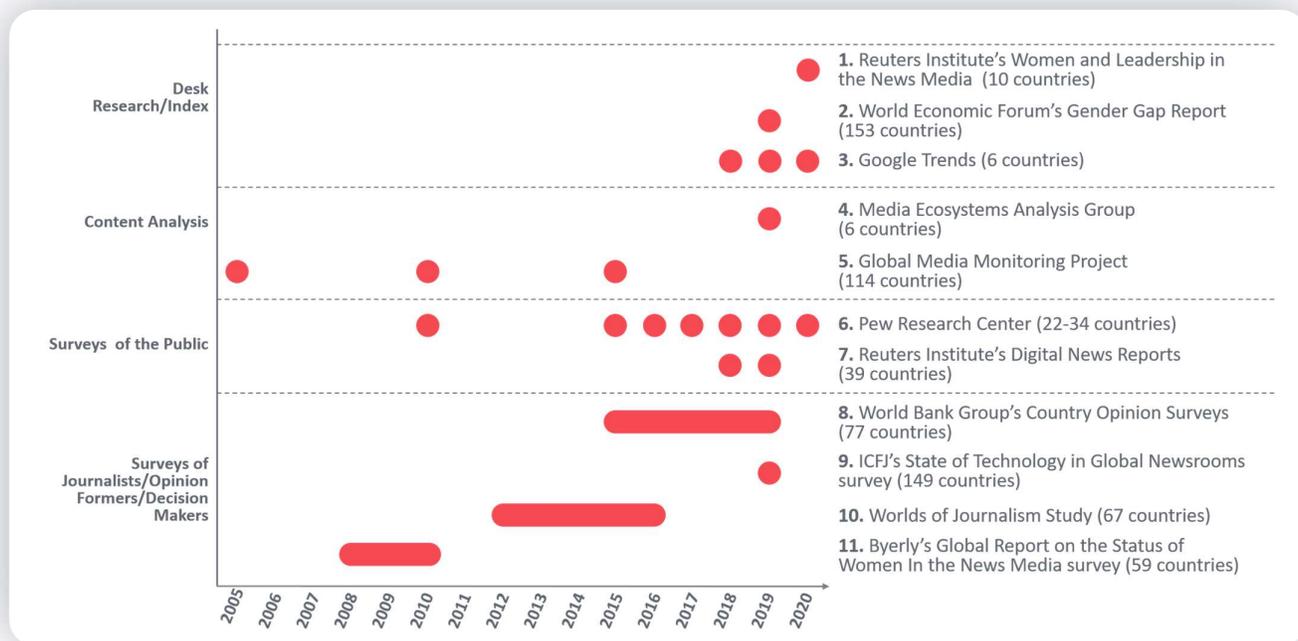
attempt to create a coherent picture. Among these, ten multi-country data sources have been particularly important:

1. Media Ecosystems Analysis Group (2020): a content analysis of the online news output covering the whole of 2019 in the six analyzed countries, commissioned by AKAS in conjunction with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
2. Reuters Institute's *Women and Leadership in the News Media 2020*: a research report assessing the gender balance of top editors in ten countries, three of which are included in the list of analyzed countries
3. World Economic Forum's *Gender Gap Report 2020*: an index which includes a range of gender-related metrics covering the period up to 2019. All of the analyzed countries featured in this report
4. Global Media Monitoring Project Reports (2005, 2010, 2015): a content analysis carried out every five years on one day in 114 countries. It represents the most quoted data source in the academic literature on this subject
5. Various reports from the Pew Research Center covering fieldwork between 2010 and 2019, the majority of which covered all six analyzed countries
6. Two Reuters Institute's *Digital News Reports* from 2019, one surveying publics in 38 countries and the other focused on India. Four of the analyzed countries were covered in these reports
7. World Bank Group's *Country Opinion Survey* which tracks the opinions of influencers and decision makers in 140 emerging and developing countries, on an approximate three-year cycle. For this research, 77 of these reports were analyzed for the period from 2015 to 2019, focusing on media opinion leaders
8. International Center for Journalists' *State of Technology in Global Newsrooms* survey (2018, 2019): a survey of journalists covering 149 countries in 2019, although a breakdown by individual countries was not possible due to small sample sizes
9. Worlds of Journalism Study (2019): a survey of journalists in 67 countries, including five of the analyzed countries. These were carried out between 2012 and 2016
10. Carolyn M. Byerly's *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*, commissioned by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and *The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Journalism*, which were based on surveys carried out between 2008 and 2010 covering 522 news media organizations across 59 countries



This report contains **50 recommendations** and is supplemented with a **news providers' gender parity checklist** as well as a **presentation** which tells the story in the report through slides.

Fieldwork dates for the 11 multi-country surveys and analyses



Source: AKAS (2020)

Note:

For the purposes of this report, *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*, the term 'gender balance' is used to refer to the balance between women and men. Luba Kassova and AKAS, however, understand that gender is non-binary, but is a spectrum. While this document focuses on the balance between women and men only, elements of the findings can be applied to the news' representation and portrayal of trans people and the LGBTQIA+ community more broadly. However, the representation and portrayal of trans people and the LGBTQIA+ community has been outside the scope of this report.

The report uses the descriptor 'women' in place of the adjective 'female'. Only in cases where this would be inaccurate e.g. where both women and girls are being described have we used the term 'female'. The author recognizes this as a stylistic choice.

Due to time constraints, the report has not examined the complex intersectionality of gender with race, age, caste and class. However, the author and AKAS recognize that gender interacts in a meaningful and significant way with each of these characteristics and that understanding the intersectionality between them should be a subject of future studies.

Contributors and acknowledgements

Luba Kassova is the main author of the report. She is a director and co-founder of AKAS, an international audience strategy consultancy (www.akas.london). Throughout her 20-year career to date, Luba has concentrated on unearthing insights into people as individuals, social beings and consumers, subsequently translating these into strategic solutions for organizations. Luba headed up market research, audience insight and strategic planning teams in media (BBC Journalism), telecommunications (BT Television) and not-for-profit organizations (CRUK) prior to setting up AKAS. In her work over the last two decades she has continuously analyzed the gender differences of audiences internationally, including key differences in their media and news consumption. She has also consulted for news providers on the development of their audience strategies for women. Luba holds an MA in Sociology from Sofia University, Bulgaria and an MA in Contemporary European Studies from Sussex University in the UK. She has also completed Behavioral Science modules at Warwick University and the London School of Economics (LSE).



Richard Addy is the primary quantitative research lead, the designer of the literature review approach, and the advisor on impact and story narratives for the report. He is also a director and co-founder of AKAS. Richard has nearly 30 years' experience working as a strategist and has advised CEOs, organizational leaders, and previously government ministers in his role as a government economist. Prior to setting up AKAS, Richard was the chief adviser on strategic and audience issues to the BBC's Deputy Director General who headed up BBC News locally, nationally and internationally. He is a Trustee at Mind, the UK's leading mental health charity. Richard has a BSc in Economics from Warwick University and an MSc in Economics from Birkbeck College, University of London.



Claire Cogan is a key contributor to AKAS' academic literature review which underpins the report. She also researched the three behavioral science-based case studies. Claire holds an Executive MSc in Behavioral Science from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), with distinctions in research methods and in behavioral decision science. She has many years of experience in generating insights into human behavior in everyday contexts and in different

countries, with an emphasis on consumer behavior. Claire is also experienced in leading successful organizational behavior change programs in corporate environments both in the UK and internationally.



Peter Todorov has made a significant contribution to the sourcing and analysis of the freely available secondary research referenced in the report as well as the mining of multiple databases used in it. In his 20-year career Peter has held various analytical positions in telecommunications, consulting and other sectors in the USA, UK and Bulgaria. Peter holds an MBA from George Washington University and a Master's degree in Finance from London Business School.



Judy Nagle is the proofreader and copy editor of the report. She holds an MA in Modern Languages from Cambridge University, and has a broad-based experience in cultural sponsorship, creative education and business development built up over a 20-year career across the public, private and charitable sectors. Since establishing herself as a freelance proofreader and copy editor in 2015, Judy has developed a client base among European academics at universities in Italy, Switzerland and Spain as well as in the commercial sector.



Hannan Rais is the research and operational assistant for the project. She has been particularly instrumental in developing the literature review database and the secondary research database for the project. Hannan is an experienced and established virtual assistant and researcher with a demonstrable history of working in the broadcast media industry. At BBC News, where she worked for 10 years, Hannan was the Personal Assistant to two BBC News board members covering strategy, finance, production and change. Hannan holds a BA in History from Queen Mary, University of London.



AKAS is also indebted to the following individuals and organizations for their project work, generously providing additional access to their surveys and databases:

- The project team from Media Ecosystems Analysis Group (MEAG) and in particular **Emily Boardman Ndulue**, whose content analysis has been critical to the narrative developed in this report. Media Ecosystems Analysis Group Project Team:
 - Project Lead: Emily Boardman Ndulue, MEAG's senior researcher

- Research Advisor: **Fernando Bermejo**, PhD., Executive Director of MEAG
 - Technical Advisor: **Rahul Bhargava**, Researcher and technologist specializing in civic technology and data literacy
 - Project Support: **Aashka Dave**, Researcher/community manager with MEAG.
- **Jeb Bell**, Vice President, Global Strategy, Pew Research Center and **Audrey Powers**, Executive Assistance to Vice President, Global Strategy, Pew Research Center who provided a more detailed breakdown of data in Pew Research Center's 2019 report, *A Changing World: Global Views on Diversity, Gender Equality, Family Life And The Importance Of Religion*. This and other Pew Research Center reports provided a unique window into the social norms driving gender inequality in 34 countries.
 - **Sharon Moshavi**, Senior Vice President, News Initiatives, International Center for Journalists and **Diane Owen**, Professor of Political Science at Georgetown University for tirelessly re-cutting the data from the ICFJ's 2019 *State of Technology in Global Newsrooms* survey. This survey is a rare and much-needed up-to-date insight into how journalists and news managers across the world are thinking about the challenges and opportunities

facing journalism. Journalists from 149 countries participated in 14 languages in the survey.

- **Rasmus Kleis Nielsen** (Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism) and **Louise Allcock** (Events and Administrative Officer, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism) for sharing detailed data tables for the Digital News Report 2019 and the India Digital News Report 2019. The Digital News Report is the leading global report on the news habits of audiences from across the world covering 39 countries (when the India report is included).
- **Sharon Felzer**, Head of the Public Opinion Research Group, External and Corporate Relations Vice Presidency, World Bank Group provided expert advice on the use of the unparalleled World Bank Group's Country Opinion Survey Program. The survey uniquely measures the attitudes and opinions of hard-to-reach decision makers and influencers in 140 emerging and developing countries.



These data sources have been invaluable in enriching the research upon which this report has been based.

Introduction

When the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation commissioned this important piece of work on understanding women's current representation in news media, I felt excited at the prospect of writing what I thought would be a report revealing a picture of steady global progress in women's visibility in news over recent decades. I hypothesized that progress would have made greater strides in some countries than in others, but that nevertheless, there would be progress to report in every country. I posited that in some countries we might be building a picture of near gender parity in newsrooms, governance and leadership roles, in the experts and sources used in newsgathering and in the story protagonists who featured in news outputs. I theorized that news stories would reveal multiple perspectives, balancing equally the different views of women and men – the two halves of humanity. After all, this ambition had been one of the outcomes of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women a quarter of a century ago.



As I immersed myself in the sea of evidence which the AKAS team and Media Ecosystems Analysis Group² were producing, I started to feel twinges of sadness, which deepened as the evidence stacked, frequently morphing into shock and disbelief. The rigorously evidence-based study of women's representation in news presented in the pages that follow tells a story of arrested progress (or indeed lack of progress); one where women are confined within high invisible walls and glass ceilings put in place by deeply gendered societies that favor men. More than that, this is a story of normalized gender blindness³ across both the global south and, to a lesser extent, the global north. It is a story that sketches male-dominated cultures, where men are heard, seen or read about multiple times more frequently than women in the news. It is a story of women's perspectives in news stories remaining firmly niche, despite women representing half of the population in each of the six countries examined. Worryingly, analysis of the latest indicators shows that the coverage of women's perspectives in the news has collapsed in 2020 to very concerning lows⁴.



² Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020

³ European Institute for Gender Equality's definition of gender blindness: 'Failure to recognise that the roles and responsibilities of women/girls and men/boys are ascribed to, or imposed upon, them in specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts.'

This is a story of journalism organizations reflecting back to news audiences the deeply ingrained gender inequality prevalent around the globe. In doing so, journalism worldwide perpetuates the existing biases in societies which universalize men's perspectives as the default. ***"Seeing men as the human default is fundamental to the structure of human society. It's an old habit and it runs deep – as deep as theories of human evolution itself."***⁵ It is a story which indirectly makes the case for a change in journalistic values, moving the profession beyond simply reporting the truth to, in addition, exposing gender inequality for the advancement of society worldwide.

This is a call to action for journalists to challenge the status quo in which women's voices remain marginalized both inside and outside newsrooms. It is a call to action to governing boards, leadership teams, and journalists in news organizations to become feminists in the broadest sense of the term i.e. to see and report the world not just from men's perspectives but also from women's perspectives, which are routinely unintentionally forgotten or deliberately disregarded. It is a call to action for journalists to produce news which empowers girls and women to believe that their voice is of value and that they have agency to change the course of their lives, just as women role models have done before them and continue to do today. After all, self-worth is socialized. The narrative about women (or absence of it) that society endorses, that news media amplifies, is a mirror that girls and women hold up close to build their self-worth. ***"Who is heard and who is not defines the status quo...By redefining whose voice is valued, we redefine our society and its values."***⁶



With the rise of populist democracies and authoritarian dictatorships worldwide, I fear that this report may become increasingly relevant in the years to come. According to Bloomberg Economics' classification⁷, 68% of the G20's GDP in 2019 was under the governance of either populist leaders in democracies or non-democratic regimes. This was up from 65% in 2017 and 33% in 2016. As the renowned British-Turkish writer, academic and women's rights activist Elif Shafak observed: ***"...whenever populist nationalism, political isolationism and, eventually, authoritarianism are on the rise, so is sexism. The first people to lose their rights are women and minorities."***⁸

⁴ AKAS, 2020a

⁵ Criado Perez, 2019

⁶ Solnit, 2017

⁷ O'Brien, 2019

⁸ Shafak, 2020

While understanding that the impact of populist governments on the representation of women in the news was outside the scope of this report, it is important to note that it is likely to be substantially negative. Populist leaders typically hold traditional gender roles and patriarchal values in high regard, thus reinforcing gender stereotypes which confine women's roles primarily to those of carers and homemakers. *“A common feature can be observed in all current versions of right-wing populism: an ‘obsession with gender’ and sexuality in different arenas. Populist actors conjure up the heteronormative nuclear family as the model of social organization, attack reproductive rights, question sex education, criticize a so-called ‘gender ideology,’ reject same-sex marriage and seek to re-install biologically understood binary gender differences.”*⁹

In March 2020, in advance of International Women's Day, the United Nations Development Programme released its new Gender Social Norm Index which revealed extraordinary prejudice against women globally¹⁰. The data revealed that 91% of men and 86% of women across 75 countries covering 80% of the world's population hold at least one bias against women¹¹. Raquel Lagunas, acting director of United Nations Development Programme's gender team highlighted a global backlash against women: *“UNDP is very conscious of the backlash against women's rights. We are aware and we are concerned.”*¹²



As I was writing this report, at times I was stunned not only by the extent to which men are prioritized at the expense of women globally, but also by how **normalized gender inequalities and pro-male biases are in societies among both men and women**. For example, a significant proportion of men and women globally, and in the six countries which are the subject of this report, believed that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife. In fact, more than half of men and women held this opinion in Nigeria, more than a third in South Africa and India and 14% and 12% in the US and UK¹³.

AKAS recently tested the level of public acceptance of statements that expose evidence of gender inequality in news in the UK and US. For example, Media

Ecosystems Analysis Group, in their innovative content analysis of news outputs from 80 online news providers in 2019, found that only 29% of contributors to or experts featured in news in the UK and 25% in the US were women. A survey putting these results to the public revealed a high level of acceptance of this gender imbalance, exposing the social normalization of gender inequality. Only 16% of the public surveyed in the UK and 15% in the US registered dissatisfaction when presented with these facts. However, it should be noted (as set out later in Part 4, Chapter 1, Figure 4.3) that when the facts were reframed, showing men's relatively higher representation compared to women's, the dissatisfaction levels rose dramatically, especially amongst women¹⁴.

Media Ecosystems Analysis Group's content analysis further exposed how small a share of news is taken up by gender equality issues across all six countries surveyed – less than one percent. **Any polemic around gender inequality is almost non-existent in the news across all countries examined in this report.**

What makes any future advancement of gender equality in the news particularly difficult is the existence of **gender blindness amongst the public in different countries. It is hard to fix something that is not seen as broken**. The analysis of public attitudes and biases¹⁵ revealed that while a majority of members of the public in all six countries claim to endorse gender equality (most strongly in the UK and US), many men and women (particularly in the global south) also think that changes to enable women's rights have gone far enough in their country. Just released evidence by the Pew Research Center, based on a survey in late 2019, shows that not only are gender-biased social norms stubbornly present in the analyzed countries, but in some countries from the global south any advances made in tackling them may be slipping back.¹⁶ **In short, the examined evidence did not reveal a strong appetite for prioritizing the advancement of gender equality amongst the public in any country in response to traditional rights-based arguments that contend that women have the right to be equal to men. This conclusion holds equally true for people in power. Analysis of a survey in the global south showed that the advancement of gender equality is not a key priority for the vast majority of decision makers, journalists and other opinion formers**¹⁷.

⁹ Dietze & Roth, 2020

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme, 2020

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme, 2020

¹² The Guardian, 2020

¹³ Inglehart et al, 2014

¹⁴ AKAS surveys, 2020

¹⁵ Ipsos, 2018, Newman et al., 2019, Pew Research Center, 2018

¹⁶ Pew Research Centre, 2020

¹⁷ World Bank Groups *Country Opinion Surveys*, 2015-2019, conclusion reported based on data for Kenya, Nigeria and India

Another survey of global sustainability experts revealed that amongst 17 Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), Gender Equality is the 15th most urgent to address¹⁸.



As I started researching the topic of women's representation in news in the specific contexts of India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK and the US, I quickly understood that this was a complex multi-layered issue which could only be understood in light of the **political, economic, socio-cultural, regulatory, technological and public news consumption contexts** in each of these countries. **Part 1** of this report is dedicated to these dimensions which profoundly influence the success (or otherwise) of news organizations in achieving greater representation of women in the news. A snapshot of some of the most salient points follows.



Women only gained the right to vote within the last 62 to 102 years in our countries of focus. They still have **limited political power** and are marginalized in political leadership in all six countries. Women's economic participation and literacy levels vary greatly across the different countries, with the UK and US leading in terms of literacy and participation in the labor force. **Women have not reached economic parity in any of the countries. Gender equality legislation is a catalyst for the improved representation of women in the news, but it can sometimes take decades for positive impact to be felt** due to a time lag between the development of gender equality policies and their implementation. South Africa leads in its regulatory provision¹⁹ for gender equality. Nigeria and Kenya, which are classified as 'weak performing democracies'²⁰ lag behind other countries in this regard, arguably because progress on women's rights is also weak.



To a lesser or greater extent, patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes exist across all countries. These norms frequently pigeonhole women as being seen primarily as carers and homemakers. This socio-cultural context influences the structure of newsrooms, with women being assigned to report on lower profile news beats such as arts, education and entertainment, while men take charge of reporting on more agenda-setting news beats such as politics and

the economy. In addition, women's primary care-giving roles across the board inhibit their path to senior leadership roles and increase the attrition of women in journalism as they grow older and their care-giving responsibilities increase. Nigeria displays the strongest patriarchal values, followed by India and Kenya. Next is South Africa (its overall position greatly aided by strong gender equality legislation) while the UK and US are the least patriarchal, although sexist norms still linger.



Younger members of the public in different countries are more likely to support gender equality²¹ than older members of the public, a finding which holds great potential for advocacy efforts engaging primary and secondary schools as well as universities in general and journalism programs in particular. **We see a direct relationship between the prevalence of gender biases in a society and the acceptance of the gender status quo** among the public, decision makers and journalists (as well as other opinion formers) alike. Consequently, it is important to recognize that any advocacy efforts should aim to weaken the existing explicit and implicit societal biases (for example among journalists) against women's advancement as a fundamental step towards improving women's representation in news organizations and news production.



News audiences globally and in our analyzed countries are more likely to be men. Women consume less news than men across all countries. This could be partly a result of news being produced mainly by men, as shown throughout the report, thus not reflecting women's perspectives or needs enough to hook them in²². The literature review undertaken by AKAS found that there is a gap in the understanding of women's and men's differing news consumption habits. If women are to be empowered through their news consumption, it is important to understand their news needs, news consumption and their interaction with the new digital technologies and social media.



The review of academic papers into **the impact of technological advancements on women news consumers and women journalists uncovered a very mixed picture that requires further research.** In terms of advantages related to technological advancements, women consume more news on social media than men, the only platform where this is the case²³. Digital

¹⁸ Globescan, 2019

¹⁹ Byerly, 2016

²⁰ International IDEA, 2019

²¹ Pew Research Center, 2018

²² This hypothesis needs further exploration

²³ Newman et al., 2019

platforms can enable more contribution from women journalists²⁴ and can also enable gender stereotypes to be challenged though galvanizing movements such as the #MeToo global campaign. In terms of disadvantages, technological advancements can perpetuate gender stereotypes²⁵. Contrary to some evidence that digital media offers unique opportunities for women journalists, other studies have found that similar gender biases persist in digital news media as in traditional media²⁶. In addition, the ongoing growth in the role of technology in newsrooms reported by journalists in all six countries²⁷, could exacerbate inequality in newsrooms. The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), in their 2019 global study, uncovered that among journalists, men were much more likely to hold technical degrees than women. Finally, and critically, the safety and mental health of journalists, particularly women, are increasingly at risk²⁸ due to the phenomenon known as ‘platform capture’, whereby organized groups use social media platforms for orchestrated campaigns of disinformation and harassment on a large scale²⁹.



Part 2 of this report concentrates on examining four gender equality indicators in news:

1. Gender diversity in news organizations which reflects women’s representation in organizational resources
2. The proportion of experts and sources in news who are women which reflects women’s visibility in newsgathering
3. The proportion of women in news coverage who are protagonists which reflects women’s visibility in news outputs/coverage
4. The proportion of stories which are dedicated to gender equality issues which reflects the prominence of gender equality in news outputs/coverage



Due to significant data gaps which prohibit a continuous analysis of the performance of each country on each indicator (detailed in the objectives and approach section earlier), the report builds a historical picture based on the literature review and analysis of sources spanning the last few decades. The content analysis undertaken by Media Ecosystems

Analysis Group provides an invaluable snapshot of the current levels of women’s representation in online news for indicators 2 to 4. For indicator 1, where there is no consistency in the metrics or measurement of diversity over time across the six countries, the report brings together 16 sources to paint a picture of the last two decades.

The under-representation of women in news organizations has persisted, especially at leadership and governance levels (as well as at ownership levels although not quantified in this report), over the last few decades. There has been no discernible improvement in this indicator in any of the examined countries in the 21st century (with marginal improvement in only two). Women form a minority of leaders, governors and top managers in news organizations in all of the countries examined.

Contrary to the expectations of great variation between the analyzed countries in terms of the representation of women as protagonists or experts/sources in the news, the evidence revealed that their proportions across all the countries examined were comparably low in comparison to men’s. In 2019, between 15% and 30% of protagonists in the six countries were women and between 14% and 29% of the share of quoted voice in online news belonged to women³⁰. As mentioned earlier, less than 1% of news stories cover gender equality issues across all six countries³¹.

News remains decisively biased towards men’s perspectives. In fact, men’s ownership and governance of media and telecommunications organizations (including news) is seen by some to legitimize male-dominated professional standards for making journalism³². Women journalists adapt to these default male-biased professional standards and “masculine” values as the universal cultural norm³³, in order to fit in in the newsroom and to progress in organizations, or because they are unaware of an alternative way of operating.

²⁴ Macharia, 2015
²⁵ European Commission, 2010
²⁶ Macharia, 2015
²⁷ Hanitzsch et al., 2019

²⁸ Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019
²⁹ Posetti et al., 2019
³⁰ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020
³¹ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020
³² Byerly, 2016
³³ Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012

A male-dominated culture is one of the leading stated reasons why there is no observed positive correlation between the proportion of women in newsrooms/senior leadership and the portrayal of women in the news³⁴. The portrayal of women has not improved in decades. This means that achieving near gender parity in newsrooms (as has happened in South Africa, the UK and the US) is not enough to improve the gender balance of news outputs. Having a third of women in top level leadership or governance positions (as is the case in South Africa, the US and Kenya) has not provided the ‘critical mass’³⁵ previously thought necessary to improve women’s visibility in the news. The relationship between the number of women in organizational resources, in newsgathering and in news outputs is not linear, despite well-established feminist change theories³⁶ hypothesizing so.

Figure 1 illustrates how a number of system level, organizational level and individual level factors need to be pushing in the right direction before progress in gender equality in news can happen. If any one of these factors is pushing in the wrong direction, the advancement of gender equality in news is likely to be hindered.

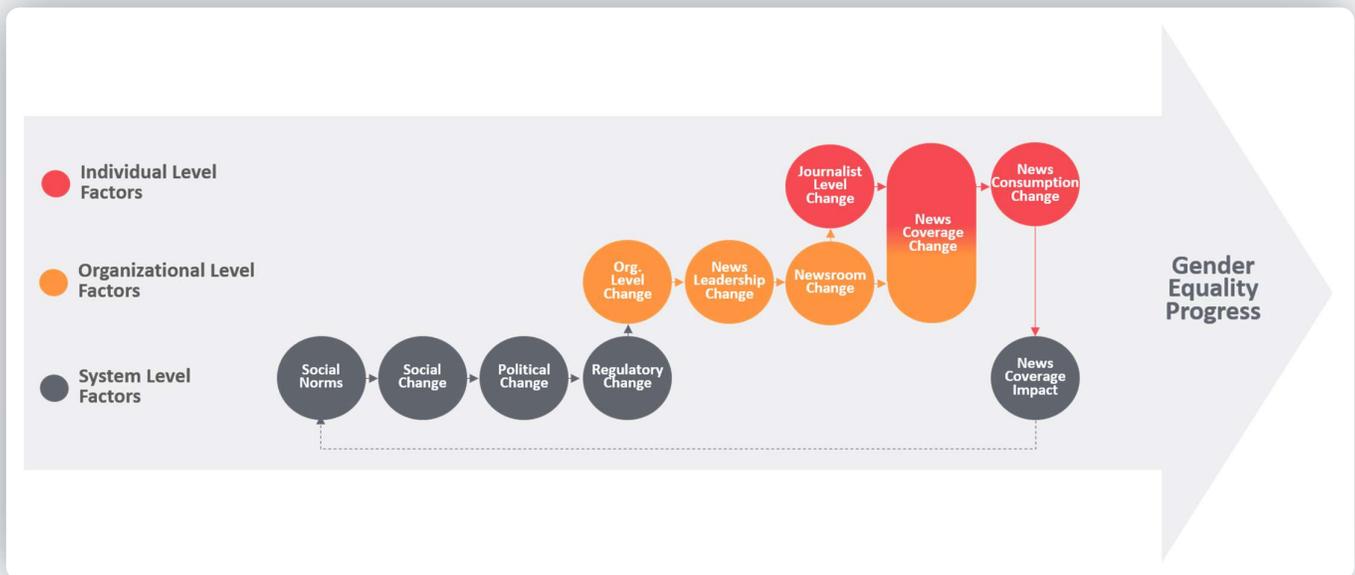
There is no ‘winning’ country among the six when it comes to improving the gender representation of women in news organizations or their visibility in the news. South Africa performs better than the other five countries in terms of gender diversity in the workplace. The UK performs slightly better relative to other countries in terms of the share of women in newsgathering (i.e. as sources and experts) and in outputs (i.e. in terms of share of women protagonists). India and Nigeria are facing significant challenges in relation to most measures compared to the other four countries.

Evidence from five of the six countries suggests that the more biased towards men a society is in its expressed social norms, the smaller women’s share of quoted voice³⁷ in the news is. Here is a whistle-stop tour of the findings for each of the four gender equality indicators in the news.

1. Diversity in the workplace/in leadership

News organizations globally have made progress on this indicator in the long-term and it is the best performing indicator out of the four researched in this

Figure 1: Change cycles in gender equality progression in news



Source: AKAS (2020)

³⁴ as protagonists or contributors

³⁵ Carll, 2003

³⁶ Byerly, 2016

³⁷ As protagonists, sources and experts

report. Progress made in the 20th century, however, has substantially slowed, and in some countries halted, in the last few decades. The research findings uncover that globally the majority of journalists and, in particular, owners and those in positions of news leadership are men, despite there being gender parity among graduates of journalism courses in many countries. Gender equality policies are an important catalyst for positive change but do not guarantee progress because their implementation has frequently been weak in some countries³⁸. Progress in news reporting and presenting by women halted between 2005 and 2015 across both agenda-setting and lower profile news beats³⁹. Diversity in news organizations varies across the six countries with South Africa leading the way as the most progressive, achieving near-parity, followed by the UK and US where women are relatively well-represented in newsrooms. Gender diversity in newsrooms seems to be improving slightly in Kenya and in India, albeit from a lower base, but appears to be declining in Nigeria.

South Africa again leads in terms of its proportion of women in senior leadership roles, followed by the US. The UK trails these frontrunners, while Nigeria lags significantly behind all countries, with the limited evidence available showing that women are barely present at senior levels of news organizations. Data from a decade ago has shown that the women who had entered into careers in journalism in India and Kenya, although in a minority, were able to progress to senior leadership levels⁴⁰.

2. Women as sources of news expertise

In the last two decades, the use of women as experts in news coverage has been limited in comparison to that of men and the latest evidence suggests that this still remains the case today. Between 2005 and 2015 fewer than one in five experts globally in the news were women⁴¹. Today men are quoted in online news⁴² twice as frequently as women in the UK, three times more frequently in South Africa and in the US, four times more frequently in Kenya, five times more frequently in Nigeria and six times more frequently in India⁴³.

³⁸ Byerly, 2016

³⁹ Macharia, 2015, GMMP, 2005

⁴⁰ Byerly, 2016

⁴¹ Macharia, 2015; GMMP 2005

Women's share of quoted voice in news has not reached parity in any news genre in the six countries, including arts and media or health – the genres where women's voices are quoted most often. Women's expert voices remain significantly muted in high profile news genres such as politics (where men's share of voices is between three and seven times higher than that of women) and the economy (where men's share of voices is between two and 31 times higher than that of women)⁴⁴.

3. News stories leading with women protagonists

In the last few decades, women's stories have been significantly under-represented in the news compared to men's, at a ratio of approximately one to five⁴⁵.

Women protagonists in the news in all our analyzed countries are far from achieving parity today, just as they were decades ago. Men feature as story protagonists three times more frequently in the UK and Kenya compared to women, four times more frequently in India, South Africa and the US and six times more frequently in Nigeria.

Where women protagonists do play a more central role in news stories, it is in lower profile news genres such as arts and media. They feature much less frequently in the agenda-setting news stories in genres such as politics and the economy.

4. Coverage of gender equality issues

The coverage of gender equality issues is often drowned out by the sheer volume of other issues in the news space. Gender equality coverage has also received the least attention from academics compared to all the other indicators examined in this report. Awareness of gender inequality and the importance attributed to it are very low not only among academics,

⁴² As sources, experts or protagonists

⁴³ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020

⁴⁴ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020

⁴⁵ Macharia, 2015

but also among decision makers and opinion formers (including journalists).

In 2019 the coverage of gender equality issues constituted less than half a percent of all news coverage in India, the UK, the US and Nigeria and less than one percent in South Africa and Kenya⁴⁶. When reporting on gender equality issues, journalists apply limited and single angles that do not fully reflect audiences' concerns⁴⁷. Ironically, between 56% and 84% of protagonists in these gender equality stories in different countries are men⁴⁸.

Despite coverage of gender equality issues increasing between three and seven times in different countries in 2019 on International or National Women's Days⁴⁹, there is evidence that interest in the topic was limited amongst the public even then⁵⁰.



This report has **three key limitations stemming from the constraints of the existing research and data.**

1. The indicators do not capture the important qualitative dimensions of the portrayal of women in the news, and the impacts of their portrayal on women and society. The four indicators covered in this report measure quantitatively the proportion of: women in news organizations; women in newsgathering; women protagonists in stories; and news stories devoted to gender equality. These indicators are an important starting point for redressing women's under-representation in the news. However, they are not sufficient in themselves for us to understand the impact that news media has overall, not only on the way in which women and girls are portrayed in the news, but also on how women are perceived by society or the way in which women understand their role in society. No industry-wide research exists which answers two fundamental questions linked to the impact of news coverage on girls or women: **What drives improved portrayal of women in the news?** And more fundamentally: **Which news elements drive improved feelings of agency and self-worth among women?** Only by answering these questions will news organizations and news funders be able to truly understand the impact of news on women.

2. There is no longitudinal data source available (at a global, country or news provider level) which has measured systematically women's representation in the news. The Global Media Monitoring Project, which was set up in 1995 in response to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, is the only longitudinal survey available globally. However, it reports on a five-yearly cycle and its last iteration was published in 2015, so there is no data available for the last five years. In addition, the methodology of this study is based on monitoring the content of news providers on a single day every five years, which means the results may not be representative of the whole year. As previously mentioned, in order to fill these cross-country knowledge gaps around the *current state* of the representation of women in news, AKAS, in conjunction with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, commissioned Media Ecosystems Analysis Group to conduct a content analysis for online news output for the whole of 2019⁵¹.

3. Globally, there is no empirical understanding of the relationship between the different parts of the news value chain: women's representation in governance and leadership roles; the proportion of journalists who are women; the representation of women in news content as contributors or protagonists; and the consumption and impact of this content on women/society. According to AKAS' news production, consumption and impact value chain framework⁵² (covered in Part 1 of the report in more detail), there are five key elements which provide touchpoints for women with the news. The first three elements, which are covered in Part 2 of our report, are organizational resources such as staff, management, governance and ownership of a news organization; newsgathering; and outputs i.e. content/news coverage. The fourth and fifth key elements of the news value chain, which have not been examined comprehensively in this report, are news consumption (including reach and engagement with content); and impact, which can be broken down into measurements on an individual, influencer and societal (decision maker) level.

⁴⁶ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020

⁴⁷ BMGF/Brunswick Insight, 2019

⁴⁸ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020

⁴⁹ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020

⁵⁰ AKAS, 2020b

⁵¹ Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, 2020

⁵² See Part 1, Context, Figure 1.1

News providers can only achieve gender balance and gender-sensitive coverage if women have a powerful voice at every touchpoint in the lifecycle of a news story. Gender balance is only as strong as the weakest touchpoint in the news story's lifecycle.



At the beginning of this introduction I mentioned how dispiriting an experience it was to see the accumulating evidence of the limited progress made in improving women's representation in news in the 21st century. But having absorbed the hundreds of research sources and academic papers across multiple disciplines that my colleagues and I have analyzed, I am also left feeling hopeful for the future.

There are many actions that news providers can take to improve women's representation and balance in the news. This report alone presents 50 recommendations either for news providers to implement or for researchers to explore. The AKAS team unearthed case studies of success among news organizations and other institutions beyond the media space. Organizations such as BBC News⁵³ and T-Systems⁵⁴ have demonstrated that it is possible to achieve a wave of change in a short space of time against all odds and despite the numerous societal, cultural and systemic barriers that stand in their way.

Below is a selection of **three strategic recommendations** that, if implemented by news providers, would have a particularly positive impact on improving women's visibility in news.

1. News organizations have enormous opportunity to develop more behavioral science-based interventions to influence the behaviors of journalists and improve women's visibility and empowerment within organizations by using nudges⁵⁵ and debiasing techniques. Interventions such as these are more likely to succeed if they are driven by a persuasive framing⁵⁶ of the problem, are conveyed by a powerful messenger⁵⁷, are championed from the top⁵⁸ and if they harness the power of existing social norms⁵⁹.

Part 3 of this report examines three case studies from the global north (the UK and US) and the

global south (South Africa) which have applied, knowingly or not, behavioral science-based interventions in order to improve: gender representation in the workplace (T-Systems in South Africa); the representation of women as experts or sources in newsgathering (BBC News' 50:50 project); and the gender balance in journalists' reporting on Twitter (FollowBias in the US). The benefit of each of these approaches is that they aim to tackle behavior directly, rather than indirectly through changing attitudes.

2. Given that progress in increasing the visibility of women in news has stalled, it is important to reframe the case for change by introducing more persuasive narrative frames to galvanize journalists to champion gender equality in news. Powerful overarching narratives lie at the heart of what spurs humans into action on important issues because they integrate different parts of the brain and generate activating emotions. Currently news organizations and academics commonly use four narrative frames: those which focus on journalistic ethics; on human rights-based journalism; on organizational culture-based change and on change as a responsibility to women as audiences. In Part 4 of the report we identify seven additional overarching narrative frames which are under-used or do not yet feature in industry-wide conversations about gender inequality in news.

Among all existing frames, we consider that there are three powerful narrative frames which may hold a strong universal appeal across the global north and the global south: the case for change centered around journalistic ethics, around business success, and around audience relevance.

3. There is a need to **craft news stories with an understanding of what women's needs, worries and aspirations are, as well as of how news coverage impacts their self-image.** There is a strong case to be made for news providers and funders to combine efforts in **creating an industry-wide gender news tracker** measuring organizational gender performance as well as perceptions and needs of women audiences across the whole news production, consumption and impacts value chain. Among other things, this would help to close profound gaps in the understanding of: what messages women

⁵³ BBC 50:50 report, 2019:

⁵⁴ See Part 3, Case Studies

⁵⁵ Thaler & Sunstein, 2009. Nudge is a concept used in behavioral science that proposes ways of influencing people's choices and

behaviors through subtle changes in the environment/the context where decisions are made

⁵⁶ Kahneman, 2012

⁵⁷ Dolan et al, 2010

⁵⁸ Smith, 2003

⁵⁹ Kallgren, Reno & Cialdini, 2000

protagonists (or their absence) in the news send to the women of today; what proportion convey empowerment vs. victimhood or reinforce stereotypes (e.g. women being seen exclusively as mothers or beauty objects) vs. challenge stereotypes (e.g. women being shown as power agents); and what proportion of protagonists portray women as survivors vs. victims, as sources of expertise vs. providers of subjective opinions. Measuring different elements of the news value chain would help to reveal what drives increases in women's representation in the news, and improvement in their portrayal and ultimately in their self-worth. At the same time, measuring these different elements will help to fill in the existing gap in building the business case in news organizations. The benefits of investing in women are becoming increasingly recognized: *"From developing talent to reaching new markets, a growing body of evidence captures how companies benefit from investing in women as leaders, employees, entrepreneurs, customers, and community partners."*⁶⁰. Recent research also shows that the business case for gender diversity on executive teams is stronger than ever. However, there is a gap in specific research in news media organizations.⁶¹

In order to understand the severe under-representation of women in COVID-19 news coverage, please read *The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News* report which was published in September 2020⁶². This report by Luba Kassova was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to examine women's representation in COVID-19/coronavirus news across newsgathering (as experts) and news coverage (featuring in gender equality angles or as protagonists) in India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US. The rich mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including computational and manual content analyses of millions of news stories, as well as surveys and database analyses, has resulted in nuanced findings, revealing not just how few women are represented in the news about COVID-19 but also - uniquely - how they are portrayed in the story. The report contains 21 recommendations which aim to support news providers who wish to amplify the substantially muted voices of women in news coverage of the COVID-19/coronavirus story.

⁶⁰ International Finance Corporation, World Bank Group, 2017

⁶¹ Hunt et al, 2020



The report has uncovered a substantial bias towards men's perspectives in the newsgathering and coverage of this pandemic across both the global north and the global south. This bias operates against a backdrop of women's effective political invisibility within the COVID-19-related decision-making process and the unique socioeconomic, health and psychological challenges that women face globally. Every individual woman's voice in the news on COVID-19 is drowned out by the voices of between three to five men. The women who are given a platform in the COVID-19/coronavirus story are mainly portrayed as sources of anecdotal views or as victims/people affected by the disease rather than as authoritative experts. The news coverage of COVID-19/coronavirus is mostly framed in hard factual terms, leaving little space for the human-centered journalistic approach that reflects women's news needs more closely. Given the deeply political nature of the COVID-19 crisis, women's structural marginalization in the political leadership roles established in response to the crisis locks in the suppression of women's voices in the story. This in turn is reflected in a smaller news share for women, which may be exacerbated by journalists' tendency in a time of crisis to revert back to 'established sources' who are significantly more likely to be men. The absence of women's perspectives in COVID-19-related news coverage means that women have limited influence over the framing of the crisis in the news and consequently, limited influence over policymaking directions. As a result, women are at ever greater risk of being further marginalized within different societies amid the most significant global health crisis of our lifetimes.



If you are reading this report, you are likely to care about the existing gender inequality in news; to both want and have the agency to amplify women's voices in news; and beyond that, to want to nourish women's feelings of self-worth and empowerment. Alternatively, you may be skeptical and questioning of the problem of gender inequality in news but open to examining the evidence presented in this report. Either way, I am confident that by the time you have finished reading, you will be convinced that patriarchal norms, boxing women into the confines of invisible walls and

⁶¹ <https://www.iwfmf.org/women-in-covid19-news/>

glass ceilings are very much alive along south and north meridians, above and below the equator.

You will have understood that these norms limit the impact of gender equality legislation, perpetuate the dominance of men's perspectives in news-making, magnify them through news consumption and restrict women's presence in news stories to under a third at best, making gender parity for the time being unattainable. But you will also feel hope, knowing that you have many levers for change at your disposal.

As a change maker, you will be motivated to focus your leadership or advocacy efforts on weakening the grip of patriarchal norms by crafting critically important initiatives for journalists, news governance and leadership boards as well as for young people in schools and universities, for it is they who are the most embracing of gender equality and the least governed by the norms that their parents and grandparents were socialized into.

You will care not just about increasing the number of women in news, but also about removing the barriers that prevent them from expressing their identities beyond those of primary carers and sidekicks.

You will have realized that you can bring about change at an organizational level, through crafting and implementing policies and weakening biases through gender sensitivity training programs; and at an individual level, by nudging behaviors via designed interventions in the workplace. You will also have understood that at the same time there is a need for news media to facilitate change at a societal level by igniting national debates around gender inequality and by exposing the need for new legislation aimed at combating structurally latent or overt patriarchal norms.

But most of all, you will have realized that it is imperative to act now and that change begins with you.



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Executive summary

The objectives and essence of the report

This report was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to examine women's representation in newsrooms, newsgathering, and news coverage in India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US. It is rooted in a literature review of 2,286 articles and three case studies; content analysis of 11,913 publications and 56.9 million stories; analysis of 74 primary surveys; analyses of Google Trends and multi-country surveys; gender-related indices; and reports undertaken by key journalistic and international organizations. These sources were used to fill the large data gaps found in measuring gender equality in the news. The report has established benchmarks for four indicators of gender equality which aim to help news providers improve their gender representation. These are: *gender diversity in the workplace and in leadership*; *women as sources of news expertise*; *news stories leading with women protagonists*; and *coverage of gender equality issues*.

The report reveals a dire picture of women's under-representation in the news. It shows that women's representation in the news has flatlined (if not reversed) in the 21st century and that women are marginalized in governance/leadership roles in news organizations. In the six analyzed countries, less than 1% of news stories cover gender equality issues. In 2019, women's share of protagonists or of quoted experts/sources in the news was between 14% and 30% in the six countries.

Patriarchal norms are at the heart of the existing invisible barriers for women in news. These norms inhibit the impact of gender equality legislation in news organizations; enable the continuing dominance of men's perspectives in news-making; amplify these perspectives through men's news consumption; and limit women's presence in news stories as news protagonists and experts, with the result that gender parity remains constantly out of reach.

However, encouragingly, news providers can use many levers for change set out in this report's 50 recommendations anchored in behavioral science and in the news providers' gender parity checklist.



Summary of Key Findings

The context

- 1. Women's touchpoints with the news:** The gender balance in news is only as strong as the weakest touchpoint in a story's lifecycle, which spans newsgathering, news production, news consumption and the story's impact on women and society.
- 2. The political, economic, socio-cultural and regulatory context:**
 - **Political and economic:** Gender parity is many years away in economic participation and political power in all six countries, with significant variation between the countries.
 - **Socio-cultural context:** Patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched in the analyzed countries from the global south and linger in the analyzed countries from the global north. Globally, 91% of men and 86% of women have been found to hold at least one bias against women. These patriarchal norms form the single biggest barrier to gender equality in news.
 - **Regulatory context:** Gender equality legislation assists women's representation in news organizations, but poor implementation renders it insufficient. South Africa leads in its regulatory provision for gender equality. Nigeria and Kenya lag behind.
- 3. Gender equality sensitivity among the public, decision makers and opinion formers is limited.** In the six countries, the public's widely claimed support for gender equality is undermined by contrasting beliefs that gender equality has gone far enough. There is widespread gender blindness which is problematic because it is hard to fix what is not seen as broken. The more accepting the public is of the status quo for women, the less driven people in power and journalists are to prioritize gender equality issues.
 - Only 4% of opinion leaders surveyed in 77 emerging and developing countries, including Kenya, Nigeria and India, considered gender equality as a top development priority.
- 4. Younger members of the public** in different countries are more likely to support gender equality than older groups.

- 5. News audience consumption:** Women are lighter news consumers than men globally (64% of men vs. 54% of women are extremely or very interested in the news) and in the analyzed countries (71% vs. 60% in South Africa, 73% vs. 60% in the UK, 71% vs. 62% in the US and 68% vs. 61% in India). This could be due partly to news being produced mainly by men, and focusing mainly on men – a problem exacerbated by the data gaps in understanding women's news needs.
- 6. Technological advancements are a double-edged sword.** Technological advancements offer women journalists the opportunity to transcend existing male-dominated organizational structures. Social media has the potential to boost women's news consumption and to exponentially magnify the impact of movements for women's equality. However, social media can also entrench gender stereotypes and destroy the lives of journalists, more often women, through persistent harassment on a large scale. In newsrooms, the growth of male-dominated digital roles could exacerbate gender inequality.

Diversity in the workplace/in leadership

- 7. Men are still in the driving seat in news media organizations.** Women form a minority of leaders, governors and top managers in news organizations in each of the countries examined. Globally, 26% of governance roles in news organizations were held by women in 2011. The reported proportion of women in top management roles was 35% in Kenya, 30% in the UK, 25% in South Africa, 23% in the US and 14% in India. When the governing structure of a news organization is dominated by men, even a gender-balanced newsroom continues to exhibit male biases.
- 8. Women lag behind men globally in terms of career progression and salary.** Research shows this gap in career progression could be narrowed if childcare and flexible working policies were implemented. In terms of editorial roles, women tend to be less well represented in the high-profile, agenda-setting beats such as politics.
- 9. Diversity in the workplace in the analyzed countries: who leads and who lags.** At near parity, South Africa is a global leader in gender parity in the newsroom (49% of journalists are women), followed by the UK (47%) and the US (42-45%). Gender diversity shows some improvement in Kenya (42% in 2015 vs. 35% in 2009) and in India

(28% in 2019 vs. 19% in 2011), but may be declining in Nigeria (24% in 2015 vs. 38% in 2011). South Africa also leads in terms of the proportion of women in senior leadership roles in news organizations (42% of top editors in 2020 are women). Nigeria lags significantly behind in terms of senior leadership, as just 4% of senior editorial roles in top newspapers in Nigeria are occupied by women.

10. The million-dollar question: Does improved gender diversity in the newsroom lead to women being more visible in the news?

Existing academic evidence is inconclusive about whether more women in newsrooms leads to a more balanced portrayal of women in the news. This report found that near gender parity in newsrooms (as in South Africa, the UK and the US) has not led to gender-balanced coverage. Having a third of women in executive or governance positions (as in South Africa, the US and Kenya) has not provided the 'critical mass' previously thought necessary to improve women's visibility in the news. Therefore, the relationship between the number of women journalists/leaders in news organizations, and news coverage which features women as experts in newsgathering and protagonists is *not linear*.

11. The existing, essentially male culture in newsrooms prevents a balanced portrayal of women in the news.

Some academic and industry reports suggest that male-biased cultural and professional standards are prevalent in newsrooms and are adhered to by both men and women journalists. Thus, professional identity overrides gender identity. Unless newsroom cultures change, the increased representation of women in the newsroom will not be enough to achieve gender-balanced coverage.

Women as sources of news expertise

12. The historical picture reveals that women's expertise has been undervalued and marginalized:

Globally, in 2015 19% of experts or commentators were women. The use of women as news sources overall had marginally decreased from 2010 (20% vs. 19%). Women's expertise was heavily skewed towards lower profile news specialisms and towards the sphere of the private, emotional and subjective vs. the public, rational and objective.

13. The marginalization of women's voices continues today:

Women's share of quoted voice in online

news in 2019 was highest in the UK, but still only 29%, and lowest in India (14%) and Nigeria (16%). Women's expert voices remain significantly muted in high profile news genres such as politics (where men's share of voices is between three and seven times higher than that of women) and the economy (where men's share of voices is between two and 31 times higher than that of women).

News stories leading with women protagonists

14. Building a long-term data picture is challenging

due to patchy data on a global and news provider level, and numerous differing definitions of a protagonist.

15. Women have been substantially under-represented in news media coverage in this century, at a ratio of 5:1.

Women have played a central role in less high profile genres. Women's centrality in news is highest in crime/violence and celebrity stories, and much less prominent in political news.

16. The imbalance in the portrayal of women protagonists persists in news today.

At 30%, the UK performed best in terms of the proportion of women protagonists headlining the news in 2019. In Kenya (23%), India (21%), the US (21%) and South Africa (20%), approximately one in five protagonists in online news headlines were women. Nigeria lagged significantly behind the other analyzed countries with only 15% of protagonists being women.

17. Women are much more likely to be protagonists in lower profile news genres.

In Nigeria women were eight times more likely to appear as protagonists in news headlines about arts/media than in those about the economy in 2019. In South Africa this ratio was 5:1, in Kenya 4:1, in the US it was 3:1 and in the UK and India it was 2:1.

18. Gender representation in political news coverage is trailing behind women's actual political representation in 2019 parliaments:

In Kenya 22% of the National Assembly were women while only 13% of protagonists in political stories were women; in the US, 24% of the House of Representatives were women vs. 18% women protagonists; in South Africa, 43% of the National Assembly were women vs. 14% women protagonists; and in the UK, 32% of members of the House of Commons were women vs. 25% women protagonists. In Nigeria the figure mirrored women's parliamentary representation (6% of the

House of Representatives were women and the same proportion were protagonists) while in India, women's representation in political news coverage was actually ahead of women's parliamentary representation (13% of the House of the People were women but 17% of protagonists were women).

advocate for social change, and to influence public opinion than their colleagues in the UK and US.

Coverage of gender equality issues

19. **Gender equality issues are not front of mind for decision makers and opinion formers (including journalists).** This has contributed to news coverage of gender equality being marginalized, with less than 1% of all stories covering gender equality in 2019. Within these gender equality stories, men form the majority of story protagonists: 56% in Kenya, 60% in the UK and the US, 72% in South Africa, 80% in India and 84% in Nigeria.
20. **International or national women's days present an opportunity** to increase the salience of gender equality issues in all six countries. Although still limited, coverage of gender equality issues increased by between three and seven times on that day in 2019 in each country.
21. **When reporting on gender equality issues, journalists apply limited and single angles** that do not fully reflect audiences' concerns.

Commonalities between countries across different indicators

22. Social norms correlate strongly with the share of women's voice in news outputs: the more biased social norms are in a country, the smaller women's share of quoted voice in news (as protagonists, sources or experts) is.
23. South Africa, India and Nigeria display a similar level of male bias in social norms while the UK and US share similar socio-economic contexts. Overall, Nigeria and India perform worse than the other four countries on gender equality in news indicators.
24. Journalists in the global south are much more likely to perceive themselves as change agents than journalists in the global north. Journalists in South Africa, Kenya and India were found to be much more likely to think it extremely or very important to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, to

Case studies of improved gender balance anchored in behavioral science

25. The case studies examine three ways of achieving behavioral change through:
 - **Nudging to create a new social norm**, driven by a powerful 'change-making' messenger within an organization, as exemplified by the BBC 50:50 project (UK).
 - **Using debiasing** technology-powered techniques among journalists who are open to change, demonstrated by FollowBias (US).
 - **Gender balancing initiatives championed from the top** of the organization and from the ground up, as can be seen at T-Systems (South Africa).

Emerging evidence-based narratives for change

26. **The most commonly used narrative frames** for change focus on journalistic ethics, rights-based journalism, organizational culture-based change and change as a responsibility to women.
27. **Narrative gaps:** The less used narratives frames for change relate to the need to change social norms; boosting the business case; audience relevance; maintaining organizational reputations; complying with regulations; leveraging technological advancements; and audience-targeting for more ambitious growth.
28. **Three powerful narrative frames** for change hold a strong universal appeal across the global north and the global south. These are upholding journalistic ethics, and two less commonly used frames which hold some promise - boosting the business case and audience relevance. Although there is growing evidence supporting the business case for gender balance in various industries, there is a need to build the case for news media, where specific evidence is currently lacking.
29. **Wording matters:** Research commissioned for this report showed that the public's concern about gender inequality increases dramatically when the gender inequality issue is framed as a comparison between men's and women's *relative* positions,

using percentage or ratio differences (e.g. “men are nearly 138% or two and a half times more likely to be used as experts in the news than women”) as opposed to a statement of women’s absolute position (e.g. “29% of experts in the news are women”). The first framing evoked a negative reaction among 53% of the surveyed public in the UK while the second framing evoked a negative reaction amongst only 12% of the surveyed public.



Gender Parity in News Checklist

Organizational Resources:

Gender diversity in the workplace

1. Put in place a comprehensive suite of policies addressing gender equality. Ensure that its implementation is the responsibility of a nominated senior leader. Policies should cover:
 - gender equality including equal pay
 - parental leave & childcare assistance (proven high impact)
 - flexible working (proven high impact)
 - addressing gender bias in recruitment
 - return to work after career break
 - sexual harassment
 - career development and training
2. Set explicit, measurable goals relating to gender equality in the organization's corporate strategy including a clearly articulated business case for change.
3. Aspire to take steps to achieve gender parity in the governance and leadership structures of your organization. Track progress in attracting, retaining and developing women journalists.
4. Tackle gender blindness through a comprehensive gender sensitivity training program for men and women at all organizational levels (governance structure, senior leadership and journalists)
 - Increase awareness of existing social norms that represent an obstacle
 - Encourage journalists to see themselves as change agents for the advancement of gender parity in news

5. Clearly articulate the business case for gender parity along the whole news value chain. Frame the need for change around
 - upholding journalistic ethics
 - boosting business success
 - guaranteeing audience relevance
 - maintaining a high organizational reputation

Newsgathering:

Women as sources of news expertise

6. Track the gender balance of experts featuring in news stories reported by your organization. Aim for gender parity.
7. Audit your current contributor lists. Compile lists of women contributors and experts for journalists to use in their stories. Use other nudges.
8. Increase women's share of expert voice in agenda-setting beats such as economy and politics to achieve parity.
9. Set an expectation of gender parity for expert panels on all platforms (e.g. TV, radio).

News outputs:

News stories leading with women protagonists

10. Track and periodically review the gender balance of protagonists featuring in news stories. Aim for parity.

11. Increase the proportion of women protagonists in agenda-setting news beats. Set targets for women protagonists in the political and government news genre.

12. Ensure fair portrayal of women. Track portrayal of women and men in the news as:

- Power brokers
- Sources of knowledge
- Victims
- Perpetrators
- Sexual objects
- Primary care givers
- Key family members

13. Increase the proportion of women protagonists portrayed as empowered.

14. Use more images of women in news, increasing the proportion that depict women as empowered.

15. Introduce a gender-neutral portrayal checklist for how to cover victims and perpetrators of crime in news stories to debias coverage of women.

News coverage of gender equality

16. Measure coverage of gender equality issues and attach targets for increasing the proportion it represents.

17. Use women as protagonists in gender equality stories.

18. Provide education and development for journalists to facilitate multi-perspective gender equality thinking that links:

- multiple gender equality themes into an overarching narrative

- coverage with issues such as employment, politics, economics, education or healthcare, that are more salient to decision-makers and the public

- different global issues together, such as the impact of gender inequality on poverty and/or climate change

19. Plan gender equality coverage on the editorial calendar, using International or National Women's Days as anchor moments to achieve high impact.

News consumption:

20. Disaggregate audience news consumption data by sex to develop an understanding of women's news needs and preferences. Craft news stories in response to this intelligence. Analyze long-term trends.

News impacts:

21. Regularly track the impact that your organization's gender equality news coverage has on:

- women who consume it
- decision makers/opinion formers (e.g. other journalists, politicians)
- society at large (e.g. through changes in legislation)

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