

Gender equality in media content and operations: articulating academic studies and policy – a presentation

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In this article, Mirta Lourenço explains the prospects when higher education studies interface with UNESCO for policy change. The baseline is that education institutions' articulation with media organizations, media professionals, policy-makers, and civil society groups is essential to achieve gender equality in and through media.

Keywords: research – gender equality; media; gender sensitive; indicators; GAMAG; alliance; training institutions

Introduction

'Grace and Frankie', created by M. Kauffman and H. Morris and 'Borgen', created by A. Price are TV series that challenge gender stereotypes. Though these two series are by no means representative of the status of women in media, they are emblematic of growing attention to issues of gender. On TV, some realistic representations of women and men are beginning to appear. The percentage of stories highlighting issues of gender equality or inequality has also increased a bit in the news (Global Media Monitoring Project 2015) – in relation to 20 years ago. There has likewise been a very slight improvement in the quantity of women in governance and top management of news media industries (International Women's Media Foundation 2011), which 'reflects the limited understanding of pluralism that has prevailed so far' (UNESCO 1945).

Sadly, the advancement may be far too slight to spin off a change of gender values, attitudes and behaviour in society. Any progress made can even be considered relative since it varies according to the region of the world.

Training of journalists and media owners or executives is a necessary but not sufficient step to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in media. Also needed are internal media policies or self-regulation that can enable sustainable changes, as well as national/public policies in support of gender-sensitive media.

In this context, research is crucial to inform evidence-based policy formulation. Through an analytical framework encompassing all the facets of gender and media, research is able to help closing loopholes in gender policies. Some of the issues to be addressed are whether research findings are influencing existing policies and the formulation of new policies on gender and media, and whether these policies are, in turn, leading to concrete actions to foster gender equality in media content and operations.

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The research community could also help identify key issues that need additional research to address gender equality in the media. Furthermore, when working at policy level, there is a constant need for empirical data on whether national, regional and international partnerships are giving impetus to gender equality in the media. It is even necessary to know what dialogue exists, and with what success, among researchers, policy-makers, media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) sectors in media and gender.

UNESCO¹

One of the essential factors favouring development in UNESCO's fields of competence has always been the exchange of experience and knowledge between universities and other higher education institutions. Joint work by university teachers, researchers and administrators from different regions all over the world provides important benefits for the entire academic community. UNESCO promotes international inter-university cooperation, in particular through the UNESCO Chairs Programme, which are a stimulus for academic mobility and the rapid transfer of knowledge through twinning, networking and other linking arrangements.

Regarding gender equality in media, in December 2015 UNESCO signed an Agreement with the International Network on Gender, Media and ICTs concerning the establishment of a UNITWIN Cooperation Programme. The main objectives of this Cooperation Programme are to:

- promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation activities on media, gender and ICTs;
- develop a global plan of activities in line with the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG²) Research Committee, including a series of activities to promote networking among universities;
- promote global actions relating to gender, media and ICTs (including publications, congresses, seminars, teaching resources and faculty and students' exchanges) that could contribute towards stimulating dialogue, advocate policy and progress in achieving gender equality in all regions of the world;
- enhance intercultural and cooperative research on issues of gender, media and ICTs;
- produce and publish reliable evidence and data on gender, media and ICTs, particularly comprehensive data on gender in decision-making, governance, agenda-setting, ownership structures and organizational policies in media and technology companies, freedom of expression, highlighting related trends in gender, media and ICTs; and
- facilitate collaboration between high level, internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the institutions members of the Network, as well as institutions outside the Network in other regions of the world.

In the framework of GAMAG, a proposal for a Massive Online Open Course on Gender, Media and ICTs is also presently being elaborated to foster gender equality and women's communication rights, by members of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Task Force involved also in the University Network on Media, Gender and ICTs. The intention is to develop openly accessible scientific and knowledge-based educational resources, particularly for developing

countries' individuals and institutions where the importance of gender equality in media has not yet been recognized. The goal is to enhance media and journalism students' understanding of gender (in)equality issues in content, structures and working environment, in the context of a convergent media landscape. Thus, the upcoming generation of media professionals will be better prepared for the real employment market they have to enter. The proponents of this course are the University of Padova (Italy), Northumbria University (UK) with the scientific support of the IAMCR Task Force and Gothenburg University (Sweden). The partners are non-academic entities such as the International Federation of Journalists and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.

In 1945 UNESCO published 'A scholarly agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender', which can be downloaded from:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/media_and_gender_scholarly_agenda_for_gamag.pdf

In this volume UNESCO puts across the importance that media and journalism education institutions interface with non-academic ones, such as media organizations, media professionals, policy-makers and civil society groups. This articulation is necessary to achieve gender equality in and through media. The publication presents significant scholarly contributions in gender and media and proposes as well a pragmatic research agenda for GAMAG. It is a result of a fruitful collaboration between UNESCO and the International Association of Communication Researchers. Paper authors are from diverse geographical regions and usually both scholars and advocates for gender equality.

'A scholarly agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender' is divided into four main sections:

- (1) Violence of gender, media and information (four papers)
- (2) Women's access to media (five papers)
- (3) Gender media policy and strategies (three papers)
- (4) Gender, education and media and information literacy (three papers)

A strategic alliance between the academic and non-academic world is undoubtedly positive to spearhead change in the field of gender and media. An illustration of how an intergovernmental body like UNESCO can make the bridge from research to policy, and from policy to action are the Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media.

An example of fruitful interface

UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media ([GSIM], <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/gender-sensitive-indicators-for-media-framework-of-indicators-to-gauge-gender-sensitivity-in-media-operations-and-content/>) were published in 2012 to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment in media. They were elaborated by Ammu Joseph, a journalist from India, Rosa María Alfaro, a researcher from Peru, Pamela Morinière from the International Federation of Journalists and Leanda B. Lech from European's Women's Lobby. Several experts reviewed the indicators and provided useful contributions.

There are two categories of indicators, for gender portrayal in media content and for gender equality in media organizations.

HERE: GSIM table of contents

The indicators are meant for broadcasting organizations and media houses to assess gaps in their gender equality policies and practice. Once identified, it is easier to develop national gender equality policies as bases for editorial content and employment. The indicators may also be useful for gender equality audits in broadcasting and press institutions to sustain media's commitment to gender equality and highlight their effective ways of mainstreaming gender in their actions. This also applies to journalists and media professionals' unions and associations, and not least journalism and media training institutions. Furthermore, the GSIM can be a valuable tool to identify areas or departments where the reinforcement of in-house training and staff coaching could make a difference. The civil society or governments can use the indicators too, to evaluate gender sensitivity in determined media and examine the extent to which equality is being institutionalized. The indicators exist in Albanian, English, French, Italian, Mongolian, Spanish and Vietnamese, and are being translated into Arabic. We welcome initiatives from those institutions wishing to translate them into other languages.

Without thorough research design and methods, it would have been difficult to succeed an accurate toolkit of indicators. Without UNESCO's functions as a global laboratory of ideas and international standard setter, it would have been difficult to have media apply the indicators – Just for 1945 and 2013; these are some of the results:

- In partnership with the Southern African Broadcasting Association (SABA) broadcasting and journalism media training institutions from eight SADC countries were trained on mainstreaming gender in the media: Malawi Institute of Journalism Education, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, Polytechnic of Namibia, Harare Polytechnic of Zimbabwe, Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation, Lesotho National Broadcasting Service, SBIS-Swaziland, Swaziland Editors Forum, MICT Namibia and Mauritius Broadcasting. Four media institutions and five journalism schools applied the GSIM: the Djibouti Association of Journalists, the Association of Mongolian Journalists, *la Radiodiffusion Télévision Congolaise* (RTC), *les Organes de presses de Gabon*, the Harare Polytechnic, the Namibia Polytechnic, Malawi Institute of Journalism Education, Zambia Institute for Communication and the University of China.
- In partnership with the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU), 12 members from 8 countries in the region signed up to take steps to introduce gender-sensitive policies in their respective organizations and to follow up on the GSIM workshop recommendations. All 12 CBU members nominated a Gender Focal Point: The Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas, Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation of Barbados, Caribbean Media Corporation (regional) Starcom Network of Barbados, Grenada Broadcasting Network, National Communications network of Guyana, RJR Communications Group of Jamaica, Radio St Lucia, National Broadcasting Corporation of St Vincent and the Grenadines, Algemene Televisie Verzorging Telesur of Suriname, Gem Radio 5 of Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean Communications Network of Trinidad and Tobago.
- In partnership with the *Eurovision News Exchange Network for South East Europe* (ERNO), 10 Gender Focal Point nominees from 9 countries were

trained in the adaptation of the GSIM to elaborate content and workplace policies in respective organizations: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia. Eight of them articulated individual work-plans.

Conclusion

In the field of gender equality in media, the involvement of scholars in policy-making or implementation brings an added value that actually may go beyond monitoring media. The question is: In which specific areas this academic – non-academic articulation is needed? That is: which type of research / data is currently necessary to advance policy-making in gender and media? To identify these areas, UNESCO welcomes collaboration with higher education institutions, as it relates to the present gender situation in media and the issues at stake.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
2. The Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) is a UNESCO-initiated global movement to promote gender equality in and through media, for which purpose it established a Framework and Action Plan. It is a follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and the work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and United Nations Women (UN Women). The Alliance brings together over 400 civil society, media, training, academic and governmental organizations in a network. The current steering committee is composed by Gender Links, the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, the International Federation of Journalists, the Caribbean Broadcasting Union, the International Women's Media Foundation, the African Union of Broadcasting, the Arab States Broadcasting Union, the Permanent Conference of the Mediterranean Audiovisual Operators, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, the World Association for Christian Communication and many more. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gamag>

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