

# MEDIA GENDER POLICY



## Towards Gender Equality in the Media

South Sudan  
2021



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## Foreword

**I**t is a great joy to have this gender policy at a time when the media landscape of South Sudan is witnessing a growing number of females join the journalism field. A couple of years ago, only a handful of female journalists existed; those few struggled extremely hard to fit into an entirely male-dominated field. Today, female journalists have a bit of breathing space because, when they look around, they see fellow female colleagues. They feel that they are not alone. This factor by itself has encouraged female journalists to stay in the field and follow their dreams of being the voice for the voiceless. It is true that we have not seen much improvement in the coverage of women's stories, yet we believe that with time female journalists will embark on bringing to limelight the stories of women, stories that may as well be dear to the journalists because they, too, are women.

### Finding missing voices

At the Female Journalists' Network, we are very much aware that having a big number of female journalists in the field is one thing, but ensuring their productivity and participation is another. That is why the gender policy is very handy and very crucial. The policy to be adopted by all the media houses in South Sudan is expected to enhance participation and representation of female journalists in the media and also to amplify women's voices through the media. For so long, women's voices have been neglected by the media. Media reports often present women as victims and not as actors or experts. This biased narrative against women has denied women the chance to express themselves as people with full potential.

This policy provides us with hope that the women of South Sudan shall now find enough space to express their views and aspirations through the media. It also leaves us with hope that female journalists will have as equal a treatment in the media as have their male counterparts. It is our hope that the media stakeholders, particularly the Media Authority, as the regulatory body, shall see into it that media houses adopt the guidelines of this policy to enhance an equal working environment for all.





Mary Ajith, Co-founder, FJN, at the policy validation workshop

## Context

South Sudan's first report on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) notes advances in the women's position (Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare, 2020). For instance, the Labour Act entitles one to a 90-day maternity leave, 45 days for breastfeeding while working for half day and the guarantee of retaining a job position after returning from leave. But one of the challenges faced by the Government and some parts of the country is that manifestation of discrimination against women remains highly visible.

This policy is a first step to removing the structural and program challenges that affect women in the area of the media, despite the various interventions and laws enacted to secure gender equality and equity. The news media, regardless of the technology used, remains one of the main sources of information, ideas and opinion for most people around the world (UNESCO, 2012). In South Sudan, media penetration is low, presenting challenges to relaying key messages and information around lifesaving interventions (UNICEF, 2021). Still, radio is the only form of mass media (with 40-60 per cent reach) for taking reliable information to people in a country which has more than 50 local languages.

Yet, South Sudan's media is losing out on women audiences. Some 73 percent of men use radio as their primary source of information, but only 37 percent of women do the same (Oxfam, 2017). Women's lack of access to resources might be a contributory factor, for example, where people use phones to access radio because more men than women have phones – at a rate of 73.4 men and 26.6 percent women (Internews, 2021). Thus, equipping more women with phones could shift women's access to information and the internet, as well as potentially shifting gender power dynamics in important ways (Internews, 2021).



The overwhelming anecdotal evidence and qualitative interviews, however, suggest that women audiences are keeping away from the media because the media content does not reflect women's voices and issues. These issues, as laid out in a 2018-20 situation analysis (UNICEF, 2021), are enormous: Men dominate most social spheres and are accorded most productive assets, powers, privileges and authority under a patriarchal system, while women are relegated to the private sphere and the care economy in which they are assigned time-consuming household responsibilities. Traditional gender roles and social norms deepen gender inequality, particularly around girls' education, restrictions of their mobility, limited decision-making power, and lack of access and control over resources. There are very few women in positions of authority in the community, and those who do occupy such positions are not perceived as having much power or influence. Women often have to walk long distances to collect water, carrying heavy containers, affecting their health, making them vulnerable to all forms of GBV and harassment, increasing their workload and placing excessive demands on their time. Child marriage is deeply rooted in customary and religious traditions and patriarchal cultures. Polygamous relationships reinforce women's subordinate status and are tied to other forms of violence. In some communities, dowry ensures that marriages remain intact, even if the girl or woman experiences abuse. Some 65 per cent of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetimes - among the highest rates in the world. Women survivors generally do not speak of GBV for many reasons, including self-blame, fear of reprisals, mistrust of authorities, and risk/ fear of re-victimization, women may suffer greater food insecurity due to their cultural and social roles as caregivers, so they may refuse food or pass on food within families. In cases involving women, customary laws tend to prevail, but its discriminatory application discourages women and girls from reporting incidents of GBV, resulting in impunity of perpetrators.

The conscious or unconscious biases that many media professionals, both men and women, sometimes have towards one-sidedly reductionist masculine perspectives is partially due to the lack of capacity to report on women and gender more broadly (UNESCO, 2012). Even where such



capacity exists, sometimes journalists neglect journalism ethics. For instance, reports have displayed faces of sex workers, violating such persons' privacy.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that male journalists consider issues that concern women as peripheral to society. Consequently, having more women in the media and having gender training for the media could encourage and see more women's perspectives reflected in the media. Yet, underrepresentation of women as industry staff persists, influenced by family, societal, and organization structural challenges. Where women are present in the media, they are largely assigned peripheral duties, given prevailing stereotypes that women don't have the ability to perform higher level tasks.

The skewed coverage by a gender imbalanced media presents another challenge for media institutions themselves; It limits the growth of the industry while also degrading the media's key role as a key partner to democracy. Furthermore, while inequalities and gender stereotypes exist in social structures and the minds of people, media have the potential to propagate and perpetuate or to ameliorate these. (UNESCO, 2012). With the constitution-making process underway, if the media gender inequality is not fixed, stereotypes could easily permeate into the process, setting back the women's rights by years or decades.

## Policy process & rationale

This policy's main pillars are largely informed by desk review of key documents and reports and interviews with selected practitioners.

Gender discrimination in the workplace, combined with a general lack of respect for women's human rights in many cultures, creates barriers for women entering the industry (Morna\*, 2002). The problem is that while the media has set itself up as the watchdog of the rest of society, it does not always take kindly to being "watched". Furthermore, Morna, describing the Southern Africa situation, posits that as "formal" or legislated discrimination against women falls away, the key challenge is how to change mindsets hardened by centuries of socialization and cemented by custom, culture and religion. In addition, it is simplistic to assume that merely increasing the number of women in top positions will result in better coverage of women's issues and a more equitable workplace. Besides, whatever their gains in the traditional media, such as print and broadcasting, a lack of training opportunities in new technologies and difficulty in accessing expensive equipment increases marginalization of women in the new electronic media. Much of the southern Africa situation from two decades ago, highlighted below, prevails in South Sudan, but in worse ways.

When it comes to breadth, the extent that the mainstream media covers "women's issues", the bulk of coverage concerns violence against women and domestic issues with missing stories including: women battling the oppression of culture and tradition; women as the primary producers of food; traders; proponents of peace; primary providers of unwaged care work in the economy; builders of shattered communities; managers of household resources. Most stories talking about women are negative. Some portray women as weak, or incompetent.

There is little or no coverage of men's domestic responsibilities- as care givers, parents and partners. When it comes to depth (the sources consulted, the extent of investigation and inquiry, and the ability to use a gender lens to uncover hidden stories, context and balance.), women's



voices are seldom heard on key national issues, yet women constitute the majority of the poor, the unemployed, and the dispossessed. When it comes to balance, many stories on gender issues don't give a balanced and fair view.

In addition, most major media roles are assigned to men. For instance, in most trainings men are largely the facilitators. When training opportunities arise, attendance is mostly assigned to men, making it hard for women to catch up with knowledge. There is a cultural perception that men are the ones to carry out major assignments.

The Global Media Monitoring Project provides evidence for the dire state of women in the media. The media institutions are skewed towards men (6th Global Media Monitoring Project, 2021). South Sudan is among the three countries with the lowest percentage of female journalists, at 17 percent. In addition, news coverage is skewed towards men. Only about ten percent of female politicians are in the news, yet nearly 30 percent of the politicians are women. Sex of presenters, reporters and news subjects & sources in newspaper, television and radio news is skewed towards men. The ratios of male to female are 6: 4 for presenters, 4: 94 for reporters, and 18:82 for sources.

More women in media and decision-making could lead to: More coverage of women; more openness to achievements of women; less treatment of women politicians as objects.

The policy is informed by UNESCO' gender sensitive indicators for the media.

The policy is also influenced by insights from, 'Gender - Tackling the Underrepresentation of Women in Media (Rattan, Chilazi, Georgeac, & Bohnet, 2019) that media organizations can achieve gender equality through a process that encompasses three steps:

- Individually or through departments or whole organizations – one must take the first step and shift out of the sense that “things should be different” to asking “what can I do differently”.



- Use data to provide a check on one's gut instincts, countering overconfidence, sustaining motivation, and encouraging goal pursuit. Self-collected data will enhance a sense of control and ownership over each media department or organization's content. Periodical public monthly reporting and sharing might tap into the competitive spirit, and create accountability as no team wants other teams to see them stagnate or backslide.
- Implement the change strategies from the bottom up with departments/ organizations deciding how to achieve equality and equity, while celebrating progress and offering support to those who might have problems to achieve their gender policy goals.



## Policy goal

This policy lays the foundation towards equality and equity in media structures, editorial content, and programs. It serves to support, not to supplant, the mandate of the ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare and the ministry of Labor.

From the outset, the policy starts from the premise that gender equality is key to growth of media institutions. Increasing the proportion of female journalists and training for all journalists would deepen the news by bringing a gender perspective to reporting and increasing the women's voices in the content.

More female voices would not only lead to an expansion of the media market, but also change society's patriarchal mindset that doesn't favor women making the news. To achieve this requires partners to be intentional and affirmative, whenever required.

### Goal

Increase gender equality in media coverage and in media institutions through institutionalizing gender sensitive measures that inform structures, systems and programs in the media sector.

### 4.1 Objectives

- Increase voices of women in the media.
- Eliminate the negative portrayal of women in the media
- Increase women staff in the industry so as to achieve diversity
- Improve protection by ensuring that workplace cultures and structures are receptive to women so as to limit women attrition from the media

## 4.2 Policy objectives will be achieved thus:

- Institutions buy into the policy
- Institutions update systems to reflect gender equality rather than relying on individual office holder will.
- Partner funding is geared towards programs that reflect gender equality.





## Key area:

# Fostering gender equality in media content- sourcing

### Objectives:

- To increase a diversity of views
- To ensure that more women come forward to talk to the media, and
- To ensure that less men block women from speaking

A diversity of sourcing leads to a diversity of views. But women appear less than men do as media sources. This arises out of outright discrimination against women by men who dominate the management and editorial boards. Women are also likely to seek life out of the news. Society has conditioned most women to let men speak on their behalf. Besides, some men are uncomfortable with women speaking because to some, speaking is about power, and women are to be subordinated to men. Women also generally lack public speaking experience and training and fear how what they say might be construed by society. The dominance of male in public spokespersons' offices worsens the problem.

### Action Points

- Train women leaders on how to interface with the media.
- Publicize the support available for women who want to be interviewed, for example through notices in the media and at community venues.
- Media conducts intentional outreach to women sources at events, such as conferences

- Seek feedback from women about their interview experience and about what they would like to change.
- Take gender equality into account at all stages of the content gathering process, such as identify female and male people to interview for each content idea.
- Conduct internal gender-sensitive reporting trainings for every staff involved in the content process
- Organize talks among men about the value in letting women speak out.

## Monitoring Indicators

- More women seek to be interviewed
- Women who are interviewed express satisfaction with the media in feedback loops





## Key Area:

# Fostering equality in media content through a gender-balanced assignment process

### Objective

- Increase the number of female journalists in media organizations that are assigned to cover hard news

Women journalists are discriminated against in hard news assignments and given soft news assignments. They are discriminated against at the assignment stage by the men who dominate the editorial or content leadership. Furthermore, some female journalists have accepted the stereotype that hard news is a male domain. Hard news is demanding, often requiring journalists to work late or travel far at short notice. Others lack training to do the hard news beat.

- To increase women representation in the political and business news coverage, which are largely a male domain, specialized business and political reporting training will be offered to female journalists.
- Encourage male journalists to cover lifestyle or soft content through training so as help demystify society' mindset that only women cover soft news.
- Media organizations will, where needed, institute affirmative action to promote more women to the top.
- Train staff on gender stereotypes
- Assign a team in the newsroom to monitor broadcasts and news for gender insensitivity and stereotypes

- Motivate journalists who cover gender issues and issues related to women e.g. through announcements, awards, or financial rewards.
- First assign the women before concluding that they can't go to the field.

## Indicators

- Proportion of hard news stories covered by women
- Proportion of soft news stories covered by men





## Key Area: Fostering equality in media content through gender-balanced staffing

### Objective

- Increase the proportion of female journalists in the industry

Women journalists are few and far in between. Societal expectations on women's housekeeping roles puts a lot of pressure and prevents women from seeking media jobs through, say, enrolling in journalism training programs. When women join the media, they lack extra support at work that takes into account the obligations that societal places on them, leading to attrition. Male journalists, who dominate the management and editorial positions in the media institutions, lack the capacity, lack knowledge. Issues that are dear to women are often not covered. In addition, because men dominate the industry, the media content often stereotypes women.

- Human resources and/or senior leadership staff identify how gender-related norms (e.g. home and childcare responsibilities) may affect people's capacity to work and provide support accordingly.
- Affirmative action in entry to journalism training programs

### Indicators could include

Proportion of women seeking media jobs and Proportion of women graduating from journalism training schools

## Key Area: Fostering gender equality in media structures and systems

### Objectives:

- Organizational structures, systems, and resources advance gender equality

Organizational goodwill is important for fostering gender equality. Structures, systems, and resources should be targeted at gender equality. Men dominate media organization structures especially at the top, including in ownership. In the context of pervasive stereotypes against women, this denies organizations the women's perspective because, often, men favor issues dear to themselves. Further, many organizations lack systems and manuals necessary to sustain gender equality. This often leaves the shift towards gender equality at the mercy of the often unsustainable goodwill of office holders. For instance, many lack manuals or policies, such as one that allows women to go the field, if they so choose, irrespective of whether they are pregnant. In some organizations, where the chief executive, the human resources manager, and the logistics manager, for instance, are men, if a vehicle is sent to the field, it is likely to be assigned to the male staff.

In addition, the systems tend to lack flexibility to understand women's issues. Accountability and punitive measures for violation of women don't exist. Media also needs to dedicate resources to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in their approaches.

- Review systems and procedures, for example appraisals, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure that they mainstream gender equality.
- Conduct periodic internal gender audits to identify and fill any gaps.



- Train and issue guidelines, information tools on gender equality to staff, including on language considered demeaning to women.
- Have a high level committee to listen and arbitrate gender-related cases
- Assign at least one senior staff to act as the focal point person for the organization's gender mainstreaming efforts.
- Align organizational policy with the national gender policy with respect to the at least 35 percent female representation at all levels.
- Dedicate resources, in money and in kind, such as cars, to women journalists.

### **Strategy**

Mainstream gender in the recruitment process:

- Have clear policies that safeguard women against sexual harassment during recruitment.
- Include women in the hr department and on all interview panels to enable gender sensitivity
- Add gender issues to the interview questions to test interviewee's approach to gender sensitiveness.
- Include gender training in new staff induction training
- Encourage more women to apply for positions for instance through affirmative action measures
- Have staff should sign a commitment pledge on gender equality, that reads: we staff will accept the gender policy during the induction period.

- Raise the confidence of women applicants by adding to adverts and highlighting the words: women are encouraged to apply

### **Strategy**

Create a working environment that is positive for both women and men:

- Assign space for pregnant women and lactating mothers
- Consider paternity leave so as to enable staff to help wives with child care.
- Conduct specialized training on gender for all staff, including program managers/editors
- Allow flexible work schedules for women during pregnancy during the early, late, and lactating periods because some pregnancy problems arise early
- Include gender sensitivity in the staff performance appraisals.
- Follow up/ initiate reporting mechanisms to resolve sexual harassment
- Adopt a non discrimination policy at the work place to encourage editors to assign women as much as men.
- Ensure women friendly toilets to deter sexual harassment, for instance, by having separate entrance to the men and women's washrooms
- Consider health insurance, for instance, during pregnancy.



## Key area: External relations, advocacy and training

### Objective:

- Ensure a conducive external environment for sustainable gender equality responses

Sharing organizational achievements and gender equality efforts can spur competition among organizations to achieve equality. Furthermore, development partners, by virtue of their control on finances, can provide a critical catalysts for media organizations. In addition, allowing the audience to comment on an organization's gender mainstreaming efforts, provides valuable feedback.

- Media organizations share annual reporting on achievements and hindrances to gender equality
- Media seeks partnerships with organizations that have expertise gender awareness and training.
- Media development partners or donors conditional on implementing the on willingness of partners to include women participation, for instance by requiring that have the beneficiaries should be women.
- Content producers assign a special inlet, such as email, for feedback from the public about gender insensitive reports or how a story preys on stereotypes against women.
- All media and partners advocate for increase in the number of female spokespersons in government and other institutions to encourage diversity of sources for the media.

- Lobby partners to engage with institutions, such as police to ensure protection for female journalists.
- Hold activities, such as drama programs, for the communities to fight the stereotypes that feed gender inequality in the media.
- Lobby ministry of gender /labor to ensure flexibility on when a woman/ man should take maternity leave.

#### **Indicators could include**

Gender analysis incorporated in project proposals, such as in the objectives to highlight how the project would affect the different genders and all staff are aware of the gender equality policy and where they can access it.





The husband speaks for family. Even if a man speaks nonsense, and the women could speak, the people are ok [with that]. It is why women's voices are not heard. Even now, when you go to parliament you just sit because you know that men will speak because that is their job to speak.

— **Journalist**

There is something additional in media houses that women may not be facing in other places. For instance, sexual harassment is [prevalent when a woman goes to the field and when she is inside the newsroom]. Most times we hear that when women are assigned - given soft stories, not given those hard stories.

— **Journalist**

Advocacy is bearing fruits - Top FM appointed a female journalist as editor in chief. This is progress. We need to increase more senior journalists in media management.

— **Journalist**

# Annex



**Grace Wudu,**  
Assistant Program Coordinator,  
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## Background of FJN

**F**emale Journalist Network (FJN) is a non-for-profit member-based network of female journalists operating in South Sudan. They include female journalists working in print media, broadcast media (radio and TV), media advocacy organizations and freelancers. FJN was formed in 2018 as resolution from a meeting that was attended by over 37 female journalists from across the country. Its main objectives are to; Empower female journalists through trainings to promote their professional skills to be able to compete in the media industry, to engage key stakeholders through dialogue, to promote safety and protection of female journalists and to ensure balanced media coverage of both women and men voices through empowering female journalists to write more stories of women.

In the past, FJN has worked with a number of partners including Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), Journalists for Human Rights (JHR), UNESCO, R-JMEC, International Women Media Foundation (IWMF), UNMISS-Human Rights Division, Catholic Radio Network and AMDISS. The partners provided both financial and moral support to FJN to do its work.



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FJN is a member-based network of female journalists operating in South Sudan. They include female journalists working in print, electronic, broadcast, media advocacy and freelancers.

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