



MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS AND MEDIA IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Abstract:

There has been a lot of rhetoric in the Southern African countries on the need to politically empower women although this has not really translated into substantial action. The current constitutions in Zimbabwe and South Africa do not provide any quota for women representation in politics. For example, women representation in the House of Assembly has fluctuated from one election year to the other since Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980. However, a new constitution appears to take critical steps towards enhancing gender equality in politics by proposing the allocation of 60 “affirmative action” seats for women for the first two terms after the new constitution is adopted. The 60 female MPs would add to the 210 parliamentary seats and the 88 senate seats that the country currently has. While this creates opportunities for more women to enter politics, the level of participation by the women proposed in the new Zimbabwean constitution still falls short of the benchmarks set by several local, regional and international policy frameworks that promote and support women’s extensive participation in politics. Thirty five years after the first multi-racial elections brought democracy to Zimbabwe ended the colonial government, the news media, as well as other social institutions, are still in the process of transformation. The news media have a particularly important role to play in a country where political participation is a new experience for many people. Media in Zimbabwe also faces the challenge of ensuring equal and fair representation of the entire population. Gender and media activists, in particular, have taken up the challenge of bringing about change in the media. This paper provides an overview of the current Zimbabwe media landscape with a particular focus on women in the media and politics. The first section presents background information about Zimbabwean women’s position in society.

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1. Introduction

Women constitute 52% of the total Zimbabwean population (Statistics Zimbabwe, 2013) whilst in South Africa they constitute 51%. Rural women face a plethora of challenges in accessing basic services such as health, family planning, education and some means of production unlike their counterparts who reside in urban areas. Under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), State Parties are, therefore, obliged to take all appropriate measures to address issues of rural development bearing in mind that most of the people living in rural areas are women. Harare and Bulawayo are predominantly urban provinces whilst the remaining eight provinces are predominantly rural settlements. The province with the highest proportion of the country's population was Harare Metropolitan with 16.7 percent followed by Manicaland with 13.6 percent. The province with the least population was Matabeleland North, 5.1 percent followed by Bulawayo Metropolitan with 5.3 percent. The survey showed that the ratio of males to females (sex ratio) was 93. Mashonaland Central was the only province that had more males than females, with a sex ratio of 101.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Constitution of Zimbabwe section 81(1) define a child as any person who is below the age of 18 years. The Marriage Act [Chapter 5:11] states that marriage of girls between 16 and 18 years requires the consent of a parent/guardian or of a judge of the High Court in the absence of the parent/guardian and that the marriage of a girl below 16 years of age requires the consent of the responsible minister. The Act makes a distinction between boys and girls by setting different marriage ages. The Customary Marriages Act [Chapter 5:07] does not specify a minimum age of marriage. It is important to note that most of the marriages happening in the country follow the customary way and are, therefore, unregistered unions. This challenge with the marriage law regime poses problems when it comes to monitoring and preventing child marriages. In January 2016, the Constitutional Court formally outlawed child marriages as being unconstitutional. What remains is for the various pieces of legislation to be realigned to the Constitution. Child marriage is usually associated with high fertility compared to fertility among women who marry at later ages. Women who marry at younger ages are more likely to marry older men. Health consequences associated with early marriages include pregnancy related illness and deaths. In addition, women are likely to suffer abuse in cases where the spousal age difference is wide. Data from the 2014 MICS shows that child marriages, especially marriages before age 15, have been on the decline over the years.

2. Position of women in Zimbabwe

The voice of women in Zimbabwe has grown significantly since independence. The participation of women in the liberation movement was recognized through the passing of legislation including Legal Age of Majority Act in 1982 (LAMA). Gudhlanga (2011) posits that LAMA provided for men and women to enjoy equal legal majority status upon the attaining the age of 18. However, Gudhlanga (2011) contends that in practice this is not what happens on the ground. She argues that under codified customary law, women still continue to be perpetual minors despite the passing of that legal age of majority act. Another law that was passed was Sex Disqualification Act which allowed women to hold public office. Some of the women who held ministerial office include Teurai Ropa Nhongo. The equal pay act is another legislation that was passed by government giving women the right to earn same amount of pay as long as they were performing the same job. These legislations were passed by government partly due to pressure from women organizations and partly because government required the support of women during elections. When asked why there are fewer women than men in senior positions in media practice the most common reason given by women is that men feel threatened. The second most common reason given by women was that women do not apply for top posts, while the third reason given by men was that women are by-passed for promotion. (Tichagwa 1988)

In the political arena, a number of women since independence have been promoted to senior positions. The promotion of Vice President Joyce Mujuru is a case in point. The developments of the past year are however mind boggling. She was accused by President Mugabe of being a witch, a traitor who wanted to topple President Mugabe from power. All these allegations were documented by state print media and electronic media. Joyce Mujuru was not given an opportunity in the State media to state her side of the story as the course of natural justice would have required.

The state print media and electronic media have taken sides to the succession debate. While the state print media have not declared their specific support to a particular faction, the articles published in the public and private media portray Joyce Mujuru as the villain. Just before Mujuru was fired from her Vice President post in 2015, the wife of President Mugabe toured the country meeting the people in all provinces accusing the Vice President Mujuru of being a traitor. Both print and electronic media in Zimbabwe controlled by the state provided generous and favorable publicity of Grace Mugabe's tour of the ten provinces in 2015 after being elected as leader of the ZANU PF women's league. In contrast when Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) asked to be given live coverage of their manifesto launch in 2008, ZBC did not refuse to screen it on electronic media but asked the MDC to pay \$165 000 for

one single event. The wife of the President however is not part of government. She however was provided with state coverage of both print and electronic media whilst she was performing ZANU PF party activities. The use of media to demonize one of its own members is a clear demonstration of how the person in power is able to determine what is news and how it should be packaged and how it is delivered. Control of media is critical to the dissemination of information and propaganda. Mujuru's character was attacked, her reputation driven in the mud, but she was not given a chance to defend herself. State media was used to attack Joyce Mujuru in the same way the colonial government attacked the nationalists when they were fighting the Smith government (Magaisa 2015).

Education is a fundamental human right highlighted in the Constitution of Zimbabwe, as it is an essential tool for achieving sustainable development. Section 27(2) of the same Constitution provides that the state must take measures to ensure that girls are afforded the same opportunities as boys to obtain education at all levels. The United Nations asserts that education is an investment in human capital that confers benefits to both individuals and societies, allowing them to reach their fullest potential. Education is indispensable for closing the gap between women and men in terms of social and economic opportunities and is key to empowering women and allowing them to become agents of change in economic, social and political spheres. It also improves the chances of women leading a healthy life and passing on the benefits to future generation (UNESCO, 2014).

Gender disparities in the education sector in areas of literacy, fields of education and school attendance reflect a situation where some parents prefer to stop a girl child to remain at home whilst a boy child continues with his education. Progress made in the education of girls and boys, women and men in the recent past shows that more women and girls leave school after primary education whilst more men complete their primary and secondary education since they are given better chances of completing their education. In Zimbabwe, persons aged 15 years and above and have completed at least grade three of primary education are considered to be literate. A higher level of educational attainment directly translates into availability of a relatively high level of skill and knowledge within the labor force. Studies have shown that progress in educational attainment contributes to economic growth and improved labor market outcomes including productivity, participation, and income and career. The results show that women were more likely to have completed lower levels of education than men. A higher proportion of men than women had attained lower secondary, upper secondary and tertiary levels of education.

According to UNICEF (2006), the adult literacy rate was 84% for men and 81% for women during the period 2000 to 2004 in Zimbabwe. According to recent research,

58% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for meaning, while 29% are completely illiterate. This confirms research findings gathered by NEEDU in 2013 which show that of 1,772 rural Grade 5 learners, 41% read so slowly that they were considered non-readers in English, while 11% could not read a single English word from the passage used to assess their reading fluency. This divide is clearly based on race, as 18% of African women 25 years and older and 13% of African men have no formal schooling, compared to fewer than 1% of white women and men (Statistics South Africa, 2002). The lack of schooling is evident in the unemployment rate among blacks, which is 25% (Statistics South Africa, 2005). Within each population group, and in both urban and non-urban areas, the unemployment rate is higher for women than men. The unemployment rate is highest among urban African women (36%) and lowest among non-urban white men (5%). Furthermore, the mean hourly earnings of men are higher than for women in all population groups, and white males earn nearly five times as much per hour, on average, as African females (Statistics South Africa, 2002). These statistics indicate that many women of color in South Africa continue to suffer a triple, intersecting oppression of race, class, and gender. Women politicians participated in the drafting of the progressive new South African Constitution, Act 108 of 1996, which is based on non-racialism and non-sexism. The constitution also provided for a Commission on Gender Equality to promote gender equality in all areas of society. Today, 30% of South Africa's parliamentarians are women, placing the country eighth in the world in terms of gender equality in government (Garson, 2006).

3. Women's Role in Media

The media is a vehicle used to inform as well as entertain the public. The media is a carrier of information, ideas, thoughts and opinions. It is a powerful force in influencing people's perceptions on a variety of issues. (Fourie 2003) The media can be both positive as well as negative in terms of the position and views of women as well as a powerful mechanism for education and socialisation (Sharma 2006). Although the media has played an important role in highlighting women's issues, it has also had negative impact, in terms of perpetrating violence against women through pornography and images of women as a female body that can be bought and sold.

Overall, the media treatment of women is narrow and continually reinforces stereotyped gender roles and assumptions that women's functions are that of a wife, mother and servant of whom they feel are flexible and can go anywhere anytime. Because of the caring role of women in the home, most women will not be there when news happens, either because they are breast feeding or nursing a sick child or husband, while their male counterparts are on the spot." *"Because of the sometimes absurd*

working hours in the media, most women are made to shun their employ by partners or spouses," she added.

A female colleague from the Standard newspaper concurred, saying: *"Media work requires that one be available any time of the day for work. So it is difficult for women to balance both work and home needs, as they normally have family responsibilities to attend to."*

But a male respondent noted: *"Most women are interested in working as PROs [public relations officers] or in NGOs, despite having undergone media training."* Another male respondent at Radio Dialogue said: *"Active recruitment of women is not there, because the organization does not have a gender policy."* Another male respondent added: *"We expect women to be home at 6 pm cooking, and not at press conferences mingling with ministers."*

4. The South African Media Landscape

Freedom of the press is guaranteed in the Bill of Rights and in 2007, the annual World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders ranked South Africa 43rd in the world in terms of press freedom. This freedom was not always allowed in South Africa, as the media faced severe restrictions under the apartheid government, especially during the states of emergency in the 1980s (Tomaselli & Louw, 1991; Tyson, 1993). Instead of the authoritarian press system of the past, South Africa would probably aspire to a mix between a socially responsible press and a development press in the future (Jackson, 1993). In fact, there is such strong pressure on the news media to contribute to nation building and reconciliation that African journalists might be accused of acting against the national interest if they expose any wrong doing by the government (Steyn, 1994; Tsedu, 2000). However, a study by the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) suggests that the news media have to tackle much more fundamental problems, including the lack of contextualized reporting, basic writing skills, accuracy, and knowledge of current events (Steyn & De Beer, 2004).

South Africa has a wide variety of television, radio, and print media. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the public broadcaster, offers four free-to-air television channels that broadcast in 11 languages, reaching a daily adult audience of approximately 18 million people (SA Government Information, 2007). In addition, the first private subscription television service, M-Net, broadcasts in more than 50 countries across Africa and the Indian Ocean islands. Satellite television is currently only available through MultiChoice, which offers 55 video and 48 audio channels. E.tv is the only private free-to-air service and it depends on advertising revenue. The SABC's national radio network consists of 15 public service broadcast stations and three commercial radio stations that broadcast in 11 languages (SA Government Information,

2007). South Africa also has 12 private radio stations that received licenses from the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) (SA Government Information, 2007) and more than 100 community radio stations. (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007).

Four major press groups control the newspaper industry in South Africa, providing 20 daily and 13 weekly newspapers, most in English (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007). The daily newspaper with the highest circulation (301,800) is the Daily Sun, aimed at the black working class (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007). The Sunday Times is the biggest national newspaper, with average weekly sales of 504,657 (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007). Three of Media24's daily newspapers target Afrikaans readers throughout the country, while almost 150 weekly regional and local newspapers serve particular communities (SA Government Information, 2007). While the South African telephone system has been described as the most well developed and most modern in Africa (CIA World Factbook, 2007), only 11% of South Africans were using the Internet in 2006, indicating a persistent digital divide (International Telecommunications Union, 2007). The government aims to narrow the divide by providing technological infrastructure to underserved communities through telecenters and digital hubs (SA Government Information, 2007).

5. Women Making News

Several studies in South Africa indicate that women remain under-represented in newsrooms across the country, as the majority of newsrooms remain white and male (Steyn & De Beer, 2004). Interviewees in the Sanef study found that women cover "soft" news better than men. Yet, at some private radio stations and in on-line media, almost all staffers are women. Many of them are under the age of 30 and hold management positions. Almost all newsrooms have male editors, except for the *Mail & Guardian*, which appointed Ferial Haffajee as South Africa's first female editor of a major newspaper in April 2004. Research findings from both the Global Media Monitoring Project 2005 and studies completed by the nongovernmental organization Gender Links provide a more detailed picture of women's participation and representation in the media. Two research projects, one conducted strictly in Southern Africa and the other globally, focused specifically on women in the news. The first and most comprehensive study was the Southern African Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS), which spanned the month of September 2002 (Made, Lowe Morna & Kwaramba, 2003). This study showed that in South Africa, 30% of women were reporters in television, 44% were reporters in radio and 29% worked as reporters in print media (p. 34).

South Africa has about the same percentage of female reporters as in the 75 other countries that participated in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) on February 16, 2005 (Gallagher, 2005). In conducting this project, the GMMP found that 38% of reporters in South Africa were female and 62% male, whereas globally 37% of reporters were female and 63% were male (Gallagher, 2005, p. 18; Lowe Morna, 2006, p. 32). While this is a hopeful result, the inequality between male and female reporters remains a reality. The GMMP found that in South Africa, women account for 22% of television reporters, 20% of radio reporters and 48% of print reporters (Lowe Morna, 2006, p. 33). These figures showed a fairly drastic change over two and a half years, suggesting that the results from the GMBS were probably more credible. In yet another study conducted in Southern Africa, results showed that women comprised 40% of radio talk show hosts (Tolmay, 2006, p. 32).

The media at times needlessly drew public attention to age, marital status, looks and domestic and family circumstances of female sources in situations that did not merit such scrutiny. This was mostly reflected in the media's coverage of women politicians or spouses of politicians performing their political duties. For example, the media often referred to MDC leader and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's wife Elizabeth Macheke as the *"35-year old daughter of long-serving senior ZANU PF official"*, encouraging the public to judge her on the basis of her father's political links and not on her capability and integrity as a woman or politician. *'Ministers' wives eye parly seats'* (NewsDay, 25/10) risked giving the impression of a cabal of women dependent on the influence of their spouses in their political endeavours. Such methods of political coverage of women may translate into electoral disadvantage for aspiring female candidates as compared to their male counterparts whose coverage focuses less on their domestic background.

The media also framed women through domestic and traditional standards through, among others, stressing the compassionate and nurturing qualities of women, while men's competences were accentuated. The term *"mother"* was habitually used when referring to some female political figures such as the wives of President Mugabe, Prime Minister Tsvangirai and, at times, Vice President Mujuru. The Dailynews (7/10), for example, opined that Macheke was a *"businesswoman"* who had now assumed *"a stay-at-home mom role, managing her husband's tight schedule"*, taking *"the political version of mom"* to avoid *"controversy"*. Such terms reflect widely held social dogmas about women as mothers, even when these women were performing official or formal duties outside the domestic context. Notably, the media carried no reports that referred to *"fathers"* prominent male politicians performing formal political duties.

Women's political activities tended to be mixed with their physical appearances such as beauty, character traits and attire regularly than they did for male politicians. One story in the Dailynews (7/10) had this to say about Prime Minister Tsvangirai's, wife Elizabeth Macheka: *"Elizabeth has been politically active on her husband's behalf since her customary wedding. Macheka controls her image carefully, focusing on her role as a mother, philanthropist and morale booster..."* It added: *"Stunningly gorgeous, one would be forgiven for thinking she is the type for beauty spars and top restaurants...Looking stunning as usual, she was splendid in trendy platform heel, expensive cameo pantyhose and a matching monochrome wrap-over subtle coloured dress"*. Accompanying the story was a picture of Elizabeth clutching her handbag. In another report, which tries to capture the *"microcosm of the widening gap between the poor and the rich"* in Zimbabwe at an MDC-T rally in Buhera, the Zimbabwe Independent (23/11) described Elizabeth as *"the eye catching Elizabeth who was exquisitely clad in purple head gear and bright blue, red, yellow and purple 'African Attire' with a turquoise blue lace over the upper top and arms"*.

The scanty opportunities given to women to express themselves on political issues were further diminished by the circumstances under which they were reported in, especially in the media's coverage of political parties' activities in the period under review. Female politicians, for example, were likely to be reported in the context of being at the centre of factionalism and succession issues. Their political activities or aspirations were sometimes associated with trouble-causing rather than competence and aspirations to occupy top political posts in life. For example, Vice President Mujuru and Deputy Prime Minister Khupe appeared in both the public and private media as mischief-makers and instigators of trouble in their respective parties in the period under review. While Mujuru was reported responding to allegations of leading a faction in ZANU PF competing to succeed President Mugabe, Khupe was accused of inciting violence and inflaming divisions in MDC-T's Matabeleland provinces. These allegations were embodied in stories such as: 'Khupe elbows out rivals in poll plot'; 'Heads to roll in MDC-T Bulawayo Province'; and 'VP Mujuru denies leading party faction' (The Herald and Chronicle 2, 12 & 19/11); and 'Tsvangirai, Khupe fall out deepens' (The Standard, 11/11). In other cases, women were mostly presented as victims of political and social disasters. For instance, Studio 7 (15/10) widely reported women in Epworth "crying" after police demolished their homes to pave way for Sunway City, a private company, to take over its land.

Women were also portrayed as support mechanisms or structures in politics. Several political campaign reports carried in the media in the period under review were urging reports that encouraged women to rally behind their male political leadership during elections. This tended to reduce women to a secondary group of people, whose existence was simply to give support to male politicians, whose political positions were

already guaranteed. For example, several reports in the public media reported ZANU PF officials, including female politicians, urging the party's Women's League to campaign for the party and President Mugabe during the forthcoming elections. No reports urging men to rally behind female candidates during the party's primaries or general elections were noted in the period under review.

Women in South Africa may be under-represented as news sources (those quoted in the news) when compared to men, but the GMMP found that they are more often included in South Africa than in other countries. When examining the percentage of female sources quoted in the news, South Africa is ahead of 13 Southern African countries with 26% of news sources being female, compared to the global average of 21% (Lowe Morna, 2006, p. 3). In South Africa, 28% of news sources in the press are women, 20% on radio are women and 12% on television are women (Lowe Morna, 2006, p. 15). Lowe Morna also found that more stories in the South African media reinforced gender stereotypes than those who did not. Women are more likely to be identified as victims than men, and women are more likely to be identified by family status than men. A study on talk shows revealed that none of the talk shows monitored in the study focused specifically on women's empowerment or gender equality (Tolmay, 2006).

Two Afrikaans publications in South Africa deserve to be singled out for degrading and stereotyping women. The first is the Afrikaans tabloid, *Die Son*, and the second is *Loslyf*, the Afrikaans porn magazine. *Loslyf* created quite a controversy in South Africa, especially since the editor is a woman. Both these publications belittle women, portraying them as mere sex objects.

South Africa's English-language newspapers do not have specific women's sections but call the traditional women's pages "Lifestyle" sections. These sections typically include "soft" news on relationships, health, home and garden, fashion, travel, the environment, and food and wine. The Afrikaans newspapers, at least in their online editions, still have a section called "Women," with similar content as the English lifestyle sections. The owner of the three Afrikaans newspapers, Media24, is also online at www.women24.com, where content from its publications is available in English. One exception is the *Mail & Guardian*, which publishes a section called "Body Language" where women's issues are addressed from a feminist perspective. When Haffajee became editor of this paper, she indicated that she wanted to publish more stories on domestic violence and rape (Coleman, 2004). Newspaper sections targeting women often arrange special events and competitions for readers. While the *Sowetan* does not have a women's section, it launched a Women's Club seven years ago to arrange motivational speeches and networking opportunities to empower women.

Several magazines are also available for women, including *Sarie*, *Fair Lady*, and *True Love*, a publication aimed at young black women. South African editions of internationally based women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* are also sold in South Africa.

The gender gap in news preferences within the South African media audience is fairly small. A study of media audiences found that both men (40%) and women (49%) identify television as their main source for news (Lowe Morna, Rama & Muriungi, 2006). Radio is the second most important news source for women and men (34% in each case), but more men (21%) than women (15%) rely on newspapers as their main source of news. One of the biggest gender gaps was found in reliance upon the Internet for news, with 4% of men relying on the Internet for news in comparison to 1% of women.

According to the audience study, the majority of citizens are relatively unsophisticated news audience members. Most men and women prefer short news reports, and more women (9%) than men (5%) prefer news that asks for feedback, like letters to the editor and talk shows. A low percentage of men and women identified opinion and commentary as their favorite news genre. The study found that a high proportion of women and men found the portrayal of women as mere sex objects uncomfortable or insulting, with only 7% of men saying such images encourage them to buy the newspaper or watch the news. Both men (56%) and women (73%) said they would find news more interesting if women were featured in a greater diversity of roles. A study on radio talk shows conducted in Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe showed that women compose only 25% of callers to radio talk shows in South Africa and 39% of guests called to the shows (Tolmay, 2006). The topic that most females preferred to talk about is gender equality and women's empowerment (29%), compared to 8% for men. Most men preferred to talk about current affairs (27%), compared to 15% of women. Both women (27%) and men (21%) were interested in social issues. More women called in when the station aired programs on education and health, indicating that more shows on this topic might increase women's participation.

6. Gender and Media Activism

Gender and media activists are doing important and innovative work in South Africa. Gender Links, a nonprofit organization based in Johannesburg, and the Southern African Media and Gender Institute (SAMGI) in Cape Town both work to promote gender equality in the media. The Gender and Media Southern Africa Network (GEMSA), an organization that developed out of Gender Links, undertakes research, training, and advocacy in 13 Southern African countries. Colleen Lowe Morna,

executive director of Gender Links and founding CEO of the South African Commission on Gender Equality, has written several training manuals and has overseen various research studies designed to improve the coverage of gender. Gender Links also expanded its initial focus, which was gender and media, to include work on gender justice, gender and governance, and policy development. Gender Links initiated a new publication, *The Southern Africa Media Diversity Journal*, in 2006. Additionally, the feminist publication, *Agenda*, has been published since 1987 and distributes a radio program, offers internships, and organizes a writing program for women.

7. Conclusion

When assessing media, Southern African women have not yet achieved equal access and representation as compared to men. Women are under-represented as reporters, news sources, and audience members. Yet, in comparison with other countries, South Africa has about as many female reporters as the average reported in the GMMP and more female sources than the global average. Gender and media activists in South Africa are working tirelessly to bring about quantitative and qualitative changes in the media industry. The media have a responsibility in this new democracy to transform themselves into diverse institutions that provide audience members with alternative viewpoints, including those of women. Yet, the most important change that could significantly close the gender gap in media attention is an improvement in the literacy, education, and employment of women.

There was underrepresentation of women sources in political stories that the surveyed media carried in the period under review. Reliance on men as sources in political news showed that the genre of politics is still dominated by men. Of a total of 762 voices the public media recorded in their coverage of political developments in the country in the two-month period, women constituted 15 percent (117 voices) as compared to males, who were quoted 645 (85%). Similarly, they were 108 females sources (13%) used in political stories carried by the private media against 712 male sources. In the public media, females were least represented in stories relating to politically motivated violence and conflict while in the private media, it was on issues relating to parliament. Women were more likely to be given equal opportunities with males to comment on political developments in the country only in their roles as ordinary members of the public than in any other capacity (public media) and, in the case of the private media, in their capacity as MPs. The 'ordinary' women were mostly reported in their capacities as part of the general electorate and were limited to commenting on issues relating to political developments in their various constituencies. Women MPs were mostly quoted within their fixed roles as legislators. Stereotyping of

the women was rife in the media where they were presented, among others, as victims of the family baggage, political ornaments and political troublemakers. This had the effect of attracting attention not to the females' ideas and capabilities, but on their biological, marital and physical traits. However, they were also encouraging signs in the way the media promoted women's self-awareness and fulfilment in finding political space, realisation and identity.

8. Recommendations

- The media should make it a policy to first study the gender mechanism of political institutions before approaching them for information to understand the gender distribution so that no sex would be underrepresented, especially if there is an equal opportunity for both sexes to be quoted as news sources.
- The media should broaden their sourcing patterns so that parity between men and women's views is achieved, including a multiplicity of perspectives;
- The media should continue to raise public awareness on the need for gender equality and empowerment of women in all spheres of life so that the practice of gender equality becomes a norm in the society. This would help in creating a balanced society where both men and women enjoy same opportunities.
- The media should start a comprehensive discussion in their opinion columns and current affairs programmes on the unsuitability of traditional gender roles today that society uses to either discriminate or have negative perceptions about women in politics
- Educating political institutions, especially political parties and journalists, on the importance of gender equality so that these institutions and practitioners become gender aware to avoid structures and reports that are skewed towards one gender over the other.
- Point out to Parliament and political parties that introducing gender quotas would be a positive move towards increasing women's representation and participation in politics. However, the concept of quotas should be backed by total empowerment of these women in terms of education and access to resources so that their participation becomes meaningful and fruitful.

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