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From Outrage to Opportunity:

How to Include The
Missing Perspectives
of Women of All Colors
in News Leadership
and Coverage

The third in the series of Missing Perspectives reports



Trailblazers who are advancing women's inclusion in news leadership

Introduction to four case studies

Part 3 of this report will focus on an analysis and overview of 168 news initiatives that have been implemented by 118 organizations in six regions globally. These initiatives, which AKAS researched over several months, are dedicated to tackling various aspects of the gender inequality that persists in news. At the forefront are news organizations which stand out for their innovative efforts to bring about change in women's representation and inclusion (including for women of color in countries with multi-racial populations) in decision-making at a senior level in their organization and/or in high-profile beats such as business/economics. The New York Times in the US, Mint in India, and Bloomberg across the globe are among the trailblazing organizations

featuring as case studies in this section. They are joined by the international NGO, African Women in Media, which aims to improve women's representation and inclusion in news media and coverage at a pan-African level.

The following four case studies are anchored in interviews with Mint's Editor-in-Chief Sruthijith KK, Bloomberg's Senior Executive Editor and founder of New Voices, Laura Zelenko; a spokesperson from The New York Times; and AWiM's founder Dr Yemisi Akinbobola. The interviews not only explore the work of each of these organizations in improving gender equity at leadership and organizational level, but also what has been learned along the way and what future endeavors are planned or envisaged in the areas of gender and racial equity.

Case study: The New York Times in the global north

The New York Times is the most read English-speaking newspaper website in the world. It reaches 90m monthly unique visitors in the US online⁶⁴, has 4m YouTube subscribers and 52m Twitter followers. 56% of its US audience are women.⁶⁵ 1,665,684 external websites link to The New York Times, of which 1,192 are governmental and 7,829 educational.⁶⁶

In 2020 (and since), women represented 52% of both staff and leadership (a majority for the first time) at The New York Times; people of color represented 33% of the staff and 23% of leadership. The New York Times has set a goal of increasing the representation of Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic colleagues in leadership by 50% by 2025.⁶⁷ They have also introduced a new procurement process⁶⁸ to promote transparency, integrity, fairness, competition, diversity, and accountability. In an update in July 2021⁶⁹, they published for the first time data around staff retention and promotion by race and ethnicity to offer a complete picture of their current situation and where they need to improve. Their next report will be published in 2022 and they are confident they are currently on track to meet DEI goals and targets.

On reading The New York Times's diversity report⁷⁰ and watching Deputy Managing Editor Carolyn Ryan interviewed on CNN in February 2021, I was struck by the sophisticated narrative around the need for cultural change and why high levels of representation are not enough for inclusion in decision-making. *“Over the past several years, we’ve added hundreds of staffers of color to our company into our newsroom, but our culture really hadn’t changed. Our workplace culture was essentially the same culture that was ... in the 90s... There are unwritten rules for how you get ahead, how you get the good beats, how you get the good assignments. That kind of culture really hurts people of color,”* stated Ryan.⁷¹

I approached The New York Times editorial team for an interview to understand the successes and learnings from its cultural transformation and was re-directed to the communications team. A spokesperson responded to my questions in writing. The answers which follow have been edited for brevity.

Q: What prompted The New York Times to announce so transparently in February 2021 that the newsroom culture wasn't inclusive enough and needed to change?

A: Our diversity, equity and inclusion assessment and strategy came after a clear signal from our staff — including but not limited to members of the newsroom — who told us that covering our world better means elevating and drawing more fully on the deep talent within our ranks. Our call was to transform the culture of The New York Times to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The newsroom was part of the company-wide call to action, and subsequently the newsroom formulated a more specific plan informed by months of work by a committee of newsroom journalists.

64. Comscore, average of 2021 numbers

65. Comscore, average of 2021 numbers

66. Ahrefs, 21 March 2022

67. The New York Times, 2020

68. The New York Times, 2022

69. The New York Times, 2021

70. The New York Times, 2020

71. CNN, 2020



Diversity had not translated into an inclusive culture

At The Times, we had made significant progress in diversifying the company but there was still more work to be done. People of color — and particularly women of color — remained notably underrepresented in leadership. And the company’s focus had primarily been on building a more diverse staff, with less attention paid to building a more inclusive culture. While welcoming more people of color to The Times was important, it is their experience once they are here that determines whether they are able to contribute to their fullest potential and rise into positions of leadership. Transformation and progress does not just come from DEI programs and initiatives, but embedding equality and inclusion into your culture.

Several months of interviews and analysis led us to conclude that The Times was a difficult environment for many of our colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds and demographics. This was particularly true for people of color, many of whom described unsettling day-to-day workplace experiences and did not see themselves reflected in leadership at The Times.

The New York Times started by acknowledging what was already working

Our mission attracts a diverse group of extraordinarily talented people to The Times. In past employee surveys, 95 percent of Times employees said they felt pride in working here and the majority of employees reported fulfilling careers and positive experiences. The Times has also made meaningful efforts in recent years toward achieving greater diversity, including rolling out unconscious bias training; requiring diverse candidate slates and interview panels in hiring; publishing a diversity and inclusion report annually; and launching a newsroom fellowship program to help diversify our industry.

Q: The New York Times has announced that transforming its culture is the most important element of its strategy. What are the elements included in that transformation?

The pillars of an inclusive culture: a behavioral framework, DEI being tied to mission, empowered teams, and a full launch of the strategy

A: We have identified elements of our culture that have made The Times an unwelcoming place for certain employees. We are committed to changing our company culture to address this challenge, including:

- Creating a company-wide behavioral framework that identifies the standards expected of all employees and managers to ensure effective people-leadership
- Explicitly tying diversity, equity and inclusion to our mission and values, which is a central component of the behavioral framework; and integrating the framework intentionally into our day-to-day programs, practices, processes, and interactions across the company
- Entrusting responsibility for continuing the work we have begun to functional leads and implementation teams with the authority and resources necessary
- Completing the launch of the Inclusion and Strategy Execution Office and building on our recent communications enhancements to ensure leaders consider a variety of voices and perspectives
- In the newsroom, we are changing the way we recruit, develop and promote all journalists — reporters, editors, producers, coders, designers, operations managers and others — as well as taking steps to support this work on an ongoing basis to encourage diversity, ensure fairness and foster greater inclusiveness in our culture. We have put in place infrastructure and initial steps to provide ongoing support for this work, including:
 - A new Culture & Careers department, run by newsroom leaders in partnership with H.R., to provide guidance, support and resources to managers and employees in building career paths and improving newsroom culture
 - New initiatives and programs to promote career development and mobility, creating internal opportunities for employees to grow and advance their careers
 - Better systems for personnel decisions, with panels of newsroom leaders using a new, clearer process to ensure consistency and equity
 - Creating diversity, equity and inclusion plans by department, making these a core commitment, with clear goals and plans for achieving them
 - A wider range of voices shaping our report, using a range of forums and new tools to ensure that more people from a variety of backgrounds and roles in the newsroom participate in the creative process.

Diverse newsrooms result in broader audiences

Increasing the diversity of our newsroom — more people of color, more women, more people from outside major metropolitan areas, more younger journalists and more non-Americans — is critical. We believe a diverse workforce enables us to create the strongest news report and tell the best stories that resonate with a broad audience and more fully reflect the world we serve.

Q: What have been the key learnings in your journey since the report was launched in February 2021?

Shared responsibility for change

A: Our DEI strategy and action plan spans all functions and departments, and it is up to all of us (not one person, one group or one function) to transform our culture and create an environment that



makes everyone feel welcomed and supported. We must continue to build and routinely evaluate systems and people practices to enable sustainable change.

Changing culture takes time, and requires tenacity and multiple perspectives

We have also learned that it is important to be thoughtful in how we approach this work in order to be successful. It takes time, patience, and persistence to transform a culture sustainably.

Involving voices and inputs from a range of backgrounds and experiences has been a key driver of our success. In the last year, employees have helped make The Times a better place to work across a wide range of issues – from redefining our hiring practices, to improving fertility benefits, creating new policies like childcare reimbursement during the pandemic, and establishing our new series of Global Days Off.

Leadership development curriculum

Representation in the various leadership roles matters and makes our work at The Times stronger. We aim to build infrastructure that develops strong, diverse leadership pipelines, and provides a leadership development curriculum and mentorship opportunities. The people management curriculum offered to new managers has been enhanced, and we are revamping our mentorship program to better support growth and career paths. The honesty and transparency of our report has drawn a lot of great leaders and talent to The Times as they want to be part of this work. The Times has also hired nearly a dozen new deputies to support newsroom leaders and expand their capacity to focus on leadership, development and other team needs in addition to the core demands of running the news report. We will continue adding more such roles as well as further infrastructure to support and enable excellence in leadership.

Q: When the report was released top executives at The New York Times said that they were committed to bringing about fundamental changes to the company's workplace culture. Could you share some of the changes that have worked particularly well?

A: Company-wide, being direct about our challenges, our goals and how we plan to address them, and regularly discussing each across the organization, has been the most important first step to ensure our commitment is taken seriously and prioritized by the whole company.

The next step was to ensure the company had a shared understanding of what we want our culture to be and develop a company-wide behavioral framework to be our guide. This framework distills our six values — independence, integrity, curiosity, respect, collaboration, and excellence — into observable behaviors, defining how we should approach our work, as well as engage with, manage and lead each other. The framework tackles three parts of our plan to change our culture: first, tying diversity, equity, and inclusion to our values; second, setting clear expectations and norms for our employees; and third, outlining clear expectations for effective people leadership.

Of course, changing culture takes time, and it is still early days. In the newsroom, in addition to the early steps described above, we have launched a new development program that has given employees the opportunity to embed in a different area of the newsroom to get valuable experience, grow, learn new skills, collaborate, build relationships, recharge, and possibly find what their next job could be — within The Times. We have also expanded our commitment to having an impact on DEI in the wider journalism industry with career development and mobility programs like The New York Times Fellowship Program (a one-year work program for up-and-coming journalists). We recently launched The New York Times Corps (a pipeline program for early-college students to receive career guidance from Times journalists over a multiyear period) and Editing Residency program, announced a soon-to-launch local investigative journalism fellowship program led by outgoing executive editor Dean Baquet, and started an employee giving initiative, seeded with Times funding, to support several outside organizations dedicated to increasing diversity in journalism, technology and media.

Q: What are your plans for improving the inclusion culture in the next two to three years?

A: While we may very well launch new programs and initiatives building on those we already have, we primarily want to give our existing strategy and plan the time it requires to take shape and have its full impact, rather than spinning up new initiatives before others have had time to have their full potential impact.

Cultural expectations becoming part of formal assessment of employees

We wanted to ensure there was a shared understanding of expectations for all employees. Excellent work will always be a key determinant of success at The Times. But we will increasingly rely on this broader set of expectations as we consider career paths and opportunities for our staffers at every level of the company and are beginning to formally include them as part of the annual performance review.

Holding yourself accountable

Additionally, for several years now, we have published diversity data to hold ourselves accountable for progress in diversifying The Times and its leadership. We will also provide updates on progress beyond diversity data. Making The Times a more equitable place where all employees have equal opportunities for success will continue to be a top priority for our team.

Case study: Mint in the global south

What is Mint?

Mint is a leading business newspaper based in Delhi, India. It reaches 18m monthly unique visitors online⁷², and has 253,000 YouTube subscribers and 2m Twitter followers. 41% of its audience are women.⁷³ 223,353 external websites link to Mint, of which 128 are governmental and 770 educational.⁷⁴

In 2016 the Guardian reported that Mint was “*breaking ground in an industry that has largely been dominated by men and counts 50% women among its staff.*”

When it launched in 2007, Mint was reported to have made gender equality part of its business plan, creating the role of gender editorial consultant to ensure diversity.⁷⁵

I speak with Mint’s Editor-in-Chief, Sruthijith KK (referred to as SK), about Mint’s standing in diversity and inclusion since he took over the top editor job more than a year ago (having previously been part of the launch team as copy editor). Despite his impressive career ascent in the last 15 years, SK comes across as humble. He admits to having made an exception in speaking with me about Mint’s D&I work, diverging from Mint’s ethos of doing things “*without drawing attention to them*”. He is also quick to clarify that he cannot take credit for Mint’s initial gender equality strategy, and instead is keen to give credit to the founding editor Raju Narisetti who “*had been conscious of the need to place gender as a key value in the organization’s journey.*”

“In many ways Mint was ahead of its time. It was conscious of diversity and inclusion before these dimensions became talking points in India. Now, of course, everybody cares and talks about them”,

concludes SK.

What makes Mint exceptional?

Gender diversity is viewed multi-dimensionally and supported by policies

SK explains that Mint’s diversity efforts cover several dimensions: newsroom staffing, leadership, and coverage. The latter spans the diversity of issues relevant to women, as well as diversity in expert voices “*making sure that we are not just calling the same cohort of predominantly male experts.*” Mint has adopted a policy that stipulates that its coverage should include at least one external expert voice; a further policy mandates at least one woman contributor to its op-ed pages in every issue of the daily.

It is this multi-layered approach to diversity that has allowed Mint to publish unique stories/story angles written by women journalists, tackling sensitive issues that are relevant to women. SK talks with excitement about a story that a female journalist in the newsroom has been working on at the time of the interview.

72. SimilarWeb, February 2022

73. SimilarWeb, Desktop and mobile demographics – Gender, Traffic-share as of February 2022

74. Ahrefs, 21st March 2022

75. Davidson, 2016

“So, while corporate India and many employers like to talk about diversity, one of our star reporters is working on a story questioning why the most fundamental needs of workers are not being met: access to a clean, hygienic washroom. She is covering important developments like the violence that erupted in an Apple factory in Chennai, drawing a direct link between the unrest and the lack of hygienic washrooms for workers, and for women workers especially, which is a big problem because they face issues like UTIs [urinary tract infections] when using unhygienic or overcrowded washrooms in the workplace.”

Mint has maintained near gender parity in the newsroom

Currently, 49.5% of journalists in Mint’s newsroom are women, a figure significantly higher than the proportion of women journalists reported for India in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*, which found that in 2019, 24% of journalists in top English newspapers and 18% in top Hindi newspapers were women.⁷⁶ According to SK, however, nowadays this high proportion is not unusual for English language newsrooms based in metropolitan areas such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Chennai, although it is perhaps higher than in regional/Hindi-language newsrooms. AKAS’ 2022 research into gender representation at editorial level has corroborated a significant gap between national/English-language and regional/Hindi-language publications in their gender balance.

Conscious meritocracy has resulted in a proportion of women leaders that is higher than the national average

“Where we are doing better than other news outlets, is in leadership roles held by women.” SK concedes and is proud of Mint’s higher than average representation of women in its leadership, currently standing at 41% of the editorial leadership team. This compares to the 14% of women in top level news management in India reported by Byerly a decade ago (the latest available data at a country level⁷⁷). SK attributes Mint’s success in gender diversity in the newsroom and news leadership to its consciously meritocratic approach to attracting talent.

“We have incredibly brilliant women journalists and business journalists in India. In the process of trying to attract top talent, it just so happens that so many of the people whose work we want to bring to Mint are women.”

New female voices are co-shaping the newspaper’s discourse on pivotal societal issues

SK speaks with great pride about Mint’s prestigious op-ed page. He quotes Arthur Miller’s reflection that: *“A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself”* and goes on to explain that the op-ed page is where the big ideas are born and discussed. He observes that

“men are much more eager to be published. And it is always easier to rely on experts who already have a pedigree, a standing, they know how to write for media. This is certainly a reflection of how society distributes value between men and women.”

In addition, men are more likely than women to be able to afford PR support to push their op-eds; to occupy the higher echelons of business; and to prioritize their careers over family responsibilities. These barriers present structural inequalities which are overlaid onto men’s existing cultural dominance. Despite all these barriers, SK is pleased that Mint has been able to create a

76. UN Women, 2019

77. Byerly, 2011 and 2016

“roster of up-and-coming women commentators who tend to be university professors or scholars and who have started writing pretty regularly, authentically. Among the younger generation of women there is more willingness to write.”

What has Mint learned along the way?

In a society as complex as India’s, diversity needs to be approached in an intersectional manner

SK reviews staffing data periodically, usually twice a year. With women constituting 49.5% of journalists in the newsroom and 41% of editorial leadership, he believes that while it is a work in progress, Mint is in a good place in terms of gender diversity.

“Our approach to diversity and inclusion has become more intersectional. I would like it to be more intersectional than it is today. We would like to think that we are all here on merit, but privilege plays a role”,

he states. He cites the multifarious sources of privilege: caste, education, religion, socio-economic background, a metropolitan location.

“We don’t want a newsroom populated by people solely from a certain group. We want a mix from urban and rural, from south and north, as well as underrepresented groups, such as people from the north-east or Dalit or Muslim women. A diverse newsroom results in a richer harvest of stories and perspectives. We have a serious diversity issue, but it is not currently in gender.”

Measuring and improving women’s share of voice as business experts is an ongoing challenge

In India in 2020, the proportion of women quoted in the news as protagonists, experts, or sources was six times lower than that of men — a mere 14% — the lowest of all the countries measured.⁷⁸ SK admits that Mint too has more work to do in increasing the number of women’s expert voices in its publication. He acknowledges the limitations of Mint not systematically measuring women’s contribution to the paper’s outputs in the way it measures their proportions in staff/leadership.

Conscious leadership goes hand in hand with continuity of organizational values

SK suggests that it is important for news leaders to be conscious and deliberate in their diversity and inclusion efforts while still ensuring continuity in institutional values.

“I think that it is very important that leaders are conscious, aware of and willing to work on better intersectional inclusion and diversity in the newsroom and in the product we put out. They should also be mindful of the history and promote continuous values.”

Mint has stated explicitly in several written documents that it stands for freedom, independence, and an unbiased chronicling of Indian society.

“Mint has always supported inclusion and stood for women’s rights. It has always flagged the decreasing share of women in the workforce in India, which is now worse than, say, 20 years ago.”

78. Kassova, 2020a, Media Ecosystems Analysis Group 2020

While SK perceives Mint's staff to be progressive, he reflects on the need for written statements to make explicit Mint's currently implicit ambitions for diversity.

What next?

From an organizational perspective, SK and his leadership team are in an early exploratory phase of launching a fellowship for journalists from backgrounds that are underrepresented, whether due to caste, geography, or socio-economic background, aiming to give their careers a head start.

From a societal perspective, SK is hoping for a time when Indian society removes the barriers that women face which result in continual unfair encounters at work.

"I wish for a society where it would be perfectly safe and normal, and culturally acceptable for women to work late nights. I also wish for a society which accepts assertiveness not only from people who look like me but also from women leaders, without deeming them 'aggressive' or 'unhinged'."

Case study: Bloomberg (global)

What is Bloomberg?

Bloomberg is the global leader in business and financial data, news, and insight. It reaches 36m monthly unique visitors online⁷⁹, and has 1.2m YouTube subscribers and 8m Twitter followers. 35% of its website audience are women.⁸⁰ 646,597 external websites link to Bloomberg, of which 710 are governmental and 4,014 educational.⁸¹

In 2018 Bloomberg News launched the New Voices initiative, which includes media training, representation tracking tools, and a database of female experts. It provides media training to female executives in business and finance across the globe to get them TV-ready for interviews on Bloomberg Television and other outlets. Initially launched in four cities, it has since expanded to 13 locations: London, New York, San Francisco, Washington DC, Mumbai, Dubai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Sydney, Johannesburg, Toronto, Tokyo, and Zurich. To date, the program has trained more than 400 female executives. The training includes message structuring, mock video sessions, and feedback and is conducted by an independent firm. As part of this initiative Bloomberg also expanded their database of female experts from 500 names in 2018 to an impressive 8,000 in 2022.

I speak with Laura Zelenko, a senior executive editor and founder of New Voices, who is accompanied by the Head of Communications at Bloomberg Editorial & Research. Zelenko's competence and passion, anchored in decades of editorial leadership experience, are arresting. Having experienced first-hand the feeling of being the only woman in a room full of leaders, then one of two, all the way to being one of many, Zelenko's understanding of representation, equity, and inclusion is not only conceptual, but deeply personal.

Zelenko explains that the New Voices initiative faced structural, organizational, and individual journalistic biases. Historically, journalists have often reached out to the same experts they have always used, who are mostly men. At the same time, firms and banks that Bloomberg reports on have been dominated by male experts. By identifying female executives in firms to be media trained, Bloomberg has simultaneously tackled the two sides of the problem of women's marginalized representation as experts, Zelenko explains. Another part of the strategy for improving women's representation in news has been to expand the database of female experts, which is now 14 times bigger than it was three years ago.

What makes Bloomberg exceptional?

Tripling female guests on Bloomberg TV in three years through the New Voices initiative

Bloomberg has set itself the goal of improving women's representation as financial experts across all platforms. "*The clearest indication of change has been our representation on Bloomberg TV*", affirms Zelenko, referencing the growth in the share of voice of women experts on Bloomberg TV from 10% in 2018 to 30% at the end of 2021. In view of the structural challenges in the distinctly male-dominated finance industry, although far from parity, this growth is noteworthy.

79. SimilarWeb, February 2022

80. SimilarWeb, Desktop and mobile demographics – Gender, Traffic-share as of February 2022

81. Ahrefs, 21st March 2022

“With the gained momentum and the repetition, and the constant reporting out, it’s starting to become more part of the everyday workflow, so I am very confident that we can reach 33% this year, or hopefully higher.”

states Zelenko, sounding even more positive about the future.

Visible regular tracking and senior endorsement underpin success

Zelenko had noticed a prevalent overly positive bias among the journalists in the newsroom, which manifested in their belief that gender representation was better than it was.

“What’s similar almost in every case is that editors believe their representation is better than it actually is when we get the data and report it out regularly.”

Zelenko is convinced that the best way to break down journalists’ resistance to changing their behavior is to track data publicly and to secure the most senior endorsement.

“You have to get to a point where you see results. And I think that was the hardest part. The most important thing is to protect the integrity of the data.”

A big part of the success of the initiative, she argues, is the fact that women’s representation in content is not only tracked regularly but is also endorsed and amplified at the most senior level.

“We’re tracking this every week, and reporting out, and we’re putting newsroom-wide notes from the Editor-in-Chief saying where we are, and so it’s very public.”

Teams can be held accountable by slicing the data in different ways, looking at different metrics, different Bloomberg properties (e.g. front pages, top pages, TV, print), teams, individuals, or the performance of particular stories. For example, Zelenko is able to identify the top 20 journalists globally who quote or cite women most frequently.

The main goal for Bloomberg is to show an upward trend in women’s representation across different products with different baselines.

“I had one booker ask me why we had a 30% [representation of women on Bloomberg TV] target; he said it seemed random. I said that’s this year’s target to give us something to work towards; once we hit that, next year is going to be higher. We set it to push ourselves, but it’s not the limit.”

Saying no to manels through policies

Zelenko shares that one policy has had particular success at Bloomberg: precluding journalists from participating in all-male external panels as moderators or participants.

“At first, some journalists found this to be a nuisance that their request to participate was rejected; but then they realized how the initiative was having impact. They would go back to the organizer and say we could help them find a female expert for the panel or make it clear that the organizer had to change the makeup for Bloomberg to participate. More and more of our journalists say to me this is an important thing to stand for.”



The New Voices training has a spillover effect for women's careers

In Zelenko's view, one of the benefits of the New Voices initiative media training program is that female senior executives who complete it are not exclusively tied to Bloomberg TV. She is excited to report that a high proportion of these women not only go on Bloomberg TV, but are also getting promoted.

"There is a spillover effect into their careers. By having this platform, they gain a bigger platform for their own work and career progression."

Senior workshops designed for women editors are propelling women's careers

Bloomberg has designed inclusion workshops specifically for women journalists globally, focusing on long form, magazine level editing in response to a finding that women editors' representation is worse in the biggest enterprise and investigation teams than in other areas. More than 60 women have completed the training, with the vast majority being promoted into new roles, all of which are editorial.

Addressing the internal mobility challenge helps to hold on to diverse talent

Another inclusion workshop titled "Hear Your Voices" has been designed to help first level managers — who are directly responsible for an increasingly diverse workforce in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity — make sure they understand their roles in helping retain top diverse talent, making their coverage more inclusive, and supporting career growth. This new initiative has been well received.

What has Bloomberg learned along the way?

To achieve holistic impact you need to be intentional at all levels

Improving leadership and source representation has been difficult, admits Zelenko. *“It’s not that everyone was suddenly on board. It takes a lot of messaging.”* Achieving discernible improvement requires intentional work at all levels.

“When I think of my role in making sure that we have representation in our coverage, I am looking at representation at every level of the workforce (reporters, editors, managers, anchors) as well as in coverage through sourcing.”

Zelenko argues that to achieve success it is important to be very clear in your intentions with regard to both coverage and representation in teams. And to do that you need to change the culture in the organization. And that isn’t easy.

The best way to break down barriers is to showcase the improved content

Another bias that Zelenko has observed among journalists in the past is a belief that bringing in more women experts would be detrimental to the quality of the content.

“When the journalists think they are being forced to check a box, that’s a problem. It was once common for people to suggest that identifying and bringing on more female experts would somehow lower the quality of our coverage; I rarely hear that anymore and it’s easy to point to improved coverage every week. But the more people are on board, the more senior managers are repeating the messaging, the more examples you can show of what works, the more successful the initiative becomes.”

According to Zelenko, the argument most successful in persuading a journalist to change what they do focuses on how better representation improves coverage; how it makes it more relevant, more accurate, less biased, and more complete.

“It’s also important for recruiting and retention as the next generation asks questions about representation - both in the workforce and in our content”,

she adds. She gives examples showcasing interviews that would not formerly have happened; stories that have won awards.

It is harder to shift representation in print or online than on TV and requires broader metrics

The number of guests on any given day on Bloomberg TV globally is in the dozens; but the stories that Bloomberg publishes in print daily are in the thousands. At this scale, it is more challenging to alter the makeup of the representation of experts.

To track progress online and in print, Bloomberg utilizes a broader set of metrics. Bloomberg News, and Bloomberg Businessweek and Bloomberg Markets magazines track the proportion of stories which have at least one female expert. These magazines also track the bylines of the biggest enterprise stories, as well as the gender of the freelance photographers. For Bloomberg Businessweek they track the gender of the bylines on features and the gender representation in photos.

In Bloomberg Businessweek, representation of female experts in stories was at a monthly average of 52% between June 2021 and January 2022. In January, Bloomberg’s Breaking News and Markets



teams, together with the Economics teams — representing about a quarter of the staff — more than doubled the number of stories that quote or cite at least one female expert compared to the same month a year ago.

What next?

Zelenko's aim going forward is to expand the lens of representation in Bloomberg's tracking by including race and ethnicity. This new initiative started very recently, acknowledging that achieving racial and ethnic representation is a big challenge. Zelenko's team has started to implement this goal by asking guests on TV to self-identify in terms of race and ethnicity. Self-identification is the only way to get data, she argues. Her team has also launched Black Executive and Latinx training cohorts in the US, both of which include women and men and have proved successful. Bloomberg aims to build dashboards across platforms to understand the long-term trajectory of representation as a way of making everyone feel accountable for improving gender, ethnic, and racial makeup across platforms and teams.

Case study: African Women in Media

What is African Women in Media?

African Women in Media (AWiM) is an innovative international non-governmental organization, whose goal is to raise the profile and visibility of African women in media. It does so through multiple initiatives, among them an annual conference, a database of women experts, a training program and a news content offer. AWiM has 4.2K Twitter followers, 2.2K Facebook followers, and 2.4K subscribers to its newsletter.

Since its inception in 2016, AWiM has experienced rapid growth. In 2021 the AWiM conference was held virtually. It attracted 500 registrations and 380 active participants, a more than tenfold increase in attendance compared to its inaugural conference in 2017 in which 30 women and one man participated. Collectively, last year's attendees and speakers represented 45 countries. In the same timeframe, AWiM has successfully established SourceHer⁸², an online database of African women experts across 60 fields from 28 countries in Africa and the African diaspora so far; AWiMLearning, a learning management platform through which it delivers media training exclusively for women; and a news platform, AWiMNews, which focuses on reporting issues that affect African women.

I speak with AWiM's co-founder Dr Yemisi Akinbobola - a former journalist, now academic, based in Birmingham, UK - who talks with conviction about the reasons that propelled her to set up the NGO; the importance of improving African women's representation in media; the innovative opportunities that bridging the gap between journalism and academia provides; and the benefits of joining up the abundant local knowledge that African women journalists and associations possess. Akinbobola shares that she set up the organization in the year she won the CNN African Journalist of the Year award, as a way of creating a much-needed, but until then lacking, forum for women journalists from Africa and the African diaspora to share their lived experiences, challenges, and visions for the future.

"It was really me reflecting on my journey, and what I needed at the time, and was not finding, and creating it because I realized that other women were experiencing the same thing. They needed more space for this kind of collective reflection on their experiences."

What makes African Women in Media exceptional?

Overcoming the gendered allocation of opportunity through training and a conference targeting women

The annual conference that AWiM organizes is a flagship initiative which Akinbobola devotes much time to reflecting on. After five conferences, she remains convinced that a conference that prioritizes women is the right way to circumvent the barriers that arise from the male-favoring bias that exists in news organizations. According to Akinbobola, typically, women journalists in African countries are rarely given the opportunity to attend conferences or training because these are usually reserved for their male colleagues:

"Women journalists were always missing out on opportunities for training because their male colleagues were always favored over them, in terms of training and conference attendance."

In her view, providing training that is reserved exclusively for women, and conferences that prioritize women, creates a safe environment for women to share their experiences freely and learn from

82. <https://sourceher.com/>



one another. She acknowledges that this results in men hearing less about women's challenges first hand, but it is a trade-off she considers worth making to avoid the *"gendered allocation of opportunities in skilling up and research."*

Media training tailored specifically to African women

African Women in Media set up a training platform (a learning management platform) which functions as an environment where knowledge about women's challenges in media in Africa is consolidated.

"We have developed our own pedagogical approach that speaks to the experiences and issues faced by African women journalists who are our main target audience",

explains Akinbobola.

The aim of this modular training pedagogy is to arm women with the skills they need to thrive as journalists, covering e.g. safety, digital journalism, and reporting gender angles. The numbers in each cohort of participating women have ranged from 25 to 200. In addition to the formal program, AWiM also draws its trainees together into communities of practice which are formed based on participants' specific areas of interest. This allows trainees to learn from each other as well as the formal program, while also preparing the ground for them to revisit and share their successes, and offer mutual support long after their training has been completed.

Elevating African women's voices through a SourceHer database

AWiM's SourceHer database of women experts was launched in 2021 in response to the need for more African women experts to feature in media content.

"The idea is that if, for example, you are a news producer and you want to know about biodiversity in Namibia, then we have female experts in that field you can find in the database."

Funded by Fojo Media Institute, SourceHer is searchable by subject area, industry, and country. Currently AWiM is planning to utilize the expertise contained in the database by drawing on it to roll out a series of newsletters as well as media training for the women experts.

What has African Women in Media learned along the way?

It is necessary to raise awareness of gender bias across genders

I ask Akinbobola what weight should be given to collaborating with men, given that the power in news still resides mostly with them and therefore their role in moving things forward is important. She agrees that everybody needs to be involved in the conversation. One of the ways AWiM has ensured that this is the case has been to settle on a 75:25 split between women and men speakers at their annual conferences.

"We are more deliberate in having male speakers at the conference now, because we do recognize the importance of them hearing these stories. There is a lot more we can do in terms of direct one-to-one conversations with media organizations and leadership."

Akinbobola speaks with enthusiasm about the conferences' positive impacts in challenging gender bias. For example, stories shared by women journalists from different African countries at the 2018 conference had a direct and profound effect on Dr Johnson Babafemi Akintayo, a media executive and lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication at Nigeria's Babcock University. Not only did the stories he heard challenge his gender blindness but they were able to completely overturn it, with Dr Babafemi becoming an active champion of gender equality as a result of his experience at the conference. This culminated in an article he wrote for African Women in Media, in which he shared his journey from bias to awareness and action.⁸³

Akinbobola also remembers other "lightbulb moments" when raising women journalists' awareness of existing discrimination and bias has led to improved self-care.

"For example, in our research one of the respondents was talking about different types of sexual harassment that she'd faced. This helped others draw healthy boundaries by raising their awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment."

Consolidating effort among media associations and the news industry will enhance progress

The African Women in Media conference in Nairobi in 2019 shone a light on how much local knowledge was being produced but not consolidated.

83. African Women in Media News, 2018

“I spent time meeting with different media associations, women in media associations, and realizing that there’s a lot of local knowledge being produced. These associations knew the pain points, and knew what the issues were in terms of media, but this knowledge wasn’t always shared or implemented.”

In her work in recent years, Akinbobola has recognized the danger of NGOs dedicated to advancing gender equality in news being siloed.

“I feel that there could be better collaboration across associations, but at the same time, I think we also have to recognize, inasmuch as we use the continental name ‘African Women in Media’, we are talking about several countries with many different cultures, and they don’t necessarily have to be collective.”

There are many more countries in Africa than those in the Eastern Southern region

There continue to be many different silos, not only among non-governmental organizations but also among foreign agencies who support initiatives in Africa, concludes Akinbobola.

“You find that there is concentration of support in particular regions, and I find that concentration usually to be the Eastern Southern axis, or Nigeria”,

she observes. She elaborates that money is usually concentrated on particular countries around specific issues — typically media accountability and corruption.

What next?

One of Akinbobola’s hopes for African Women in Media’s future is to focus on developing partnerships with major global news providers who could co-produce and co-publish stories with AWiMNews, drawing on the local knowledge of African women journalists and experts.

She also sees a need for greater communication between media scholarship in terms of research and curricula development, and civil society’s interventions in media industries.

“Academia moves slower than these industry-focused interventions need. This is an important conversation we need to have with academic funding bodies and publishers too.”

If she had one wish however, it would be that there were clearly articulated gender policies in all newsrooms in Africa. This would ensure that

“all media organizations in Africa [...] have a clear funnel of progression for everyone, regardless of their gender; that there is transparency in career progression and collaborative will rather than tokenistic positioning of women in leadership.”

Case study: Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a standout exemplar of the undetected but substantive portrayal problem. It was the gender equality in media leader: the only country out of 123 measured which achieved a positive score in the newly developed gender equality in media index (GEM-I) in 2020.²⁰¹ This means that according to the index, women in Bulgaria were uniquely accorded marginally higher status in news than men. In their article *Axes of power: Examining women's access to leadership positions in the news media*²⁰², Carolyn Byerly and her colleagues analyze the relationship between women in the news industry across all professional roles²⁰³ and the percentage of women who are subjects or sources in news stories. Their analysis pointed to positive and weak to moderately-strong correlations between these two elements. Based on advanced statistical analysis of data from 2010-2011, they concluded that for every one percentage point increase in the proportion of senior women professionals, there was a 0.32 percentage point increase in women's proportion as subjects and sources. Bulgaria stood out among the analyzed countries, the poster child performing exceptionally well in terms of both the high proportion of women in news organizations and in news coverage as subjects and sources. We may get very excited by these results until we discover how women are portrayed in news coverage in Bulgaria. But portrayal was not measured in the index.

Despite having reached gender parity as reporters and as subjects in news coverage, women in Bulgarian news are often portrayed in a traditional, often submissive, and even offensive light

As a Bulgarian I have had the opportunity to regularly follow news coverage from leading and smaller news outlets. What has become abundantly clear to me over my years of news consumption is that reporters, regardless of their sex, portray women mostly in stereotypes. Women are often described in terms of their appearance, age and sexuality, family status (e.g. as mothers, wives or mistresses), as men's side kicks, and as victims. Men are widely accepted by both men and women as superior in many areas of public life including politics and business, and the news coverage mirrors these beliefs. For example, 41% of adults in Bulgaria agree that men make better political leaders than women²⁰⁴, while 34% hold the view that men make better business executives. This places Bulgaria in 53rd and 52nd place in terms of the strength of endorsement of men over women out of 88 measured countries. A gender equality lens in Bulgarian news, as in news coverage in other countries, is mostly absent. Male-favoring norms are at the heart of the issue and unless news organizations conduct portrayal analyses/deep dives, these norms will not be on anyone's radar, thus having little to no chance of being softened and eventually eradicated.

To illustrate this argument, the AKAS team conducted a portrayal analysis of the main protagonist in a story which gripped Bulgaria between June and August 2022. The central protagonist was Lena Borislavova – a Bulgarian lawyer and politician, and Harvard graduate – who headed up Prime Minister Kiril Petkov's government's political cabinet between 2021 – 2022. During her short political career, she became the target of several media attacks. These attacks were not of a political, but were rather of a personal nature, specifically accusing Borislavova (more than Petkov) of an improper intimate relationship with the Prime Minister. None of the supporting evidence in the form of photos or video footage provided conclusive evidence of any wrongdoing. The last item of photographic evidence proved to be a purposely fabricated material that caused outrage in society. Nevertheless, these attacks took their toll on Borislavova who withdrew from participating in the forthcoming

201. Djerf-Pierre and Edstrom, 2020

202. Byerly & McGraw, 2020

203. Excluding governance

204. World Values Survey data, 2017-2022

parliamentary elections. A portrayal analysis of the news coverage of the story in Bulgaria²⁰⁵ revealed that the majority of the articles (58%) included a sexual reference about Borislavova. 33% of the articles made reference to her appearance and the same proportion used derogatory terms to describe her. Two articles bore the headlines: *“Lena cocked up again. She made an appearance almost in her bra and a skirt with a deep slit”* and *“Seduced and abandoned. The fate of much trash”*. Another article concluded: *“Borislavova undoubtedly possesses excellent physique but it is out of order for her to parade it in the Ministerial Cabinet.”*

Other articles referred to her as *pushy, fiery* or an *ambitious brunette*. 29% of articles mentioned or focused on her family status. An article in a major Bulgarian newspaper *Trud*, made the following damning statement: *“There is a Bulgarian saying: ‘She washes his feet and drinks the water.’ It refers to women who tend to men in power, and instead of being looked after, are turned into pathetic concubines.”* Only a minority of the articles (38%) quoted Borislavova herself. Her perspective, published on her social media platforms, was that the personal attacks on her were a result of the government’s unique attempts to break away from the corrupt past, and in the absence of uncovering thefts, dirty dealings or other incriminating actions, the government opponents attacked her personally. *“Being involved in politics in Bulgaria has its price”*, she reflected.

To conclude, Bulgarian women’s representation in newsrooms and in news leadership exceeds parity, and, according to the GMMP 2010 data, their representation as protagonists was also very high then. However, measuring these two indicators can create a falsely positive picture of gender equality in Bulgarian news, which is far from being the case. Only through a portrayal analysis, an exercise which need not be extensive or costly, could we get an accurate reading of the true positioning of women in society and in news, as well as a sense of the prevalent gender norms in the society.

205. The analysis is based on the top 24 articles discovered through a search in Google news between 15th June and 29th August 2022

Trailblazers who are reshaping news coverage of gender issues in the global south and north

Introduction to four case studies

As previously indicated, Part 3 of this report will provide an overview and analysis of 168 news initiatives, implemented by 118 organizations in four regions and globally. These initiatives, researched by AKAS over a period of months, address various aspects of the gender inequality that exists in news. In the research process, certain organizations stood out for their innovative efforts in reshaping coverage about women and other marginalized audiences whose voices have traditionally been rarely heard in the news, causing them to remain outside the focus of policy-making. Khabar Lahariya in India, Nation Media Group in Kenya, the Guardian's Global Development desk in the UK, and The Fuller Project in the US are among these trailblazing organizations and feature as case studies in this section. Khabar Lahariya – the subject of the Oscar-nominated 2021 documentary *Writing with Fire* - is an extraordinary all-women news operation whose coverage of the most underprivileged rural audiences is making waves throughout

India. Nation Media Group has set up Africa's first Gender Desk in Kenya, its coverage leading to the enhancement of the lives of thousands of women in Kenya. The Fuller Project, with whom Nation Media Group partnered in launching the Gender Desk, is a not-for-profit newsroom dedicated to reporting on issues that impact women globally. The Guardian's Global Development desk, whose reporters are predominantly women, has reached gender parity in bylines. In 2022 it launched *Her Stage*, a newsletter featuring and targeting women in developing countries.

The four case studies that follow are anchored in interviews with Khabar Lahariya's Editor-in-Chief Kavita Devi, Nation Media Group's Gender Desk Editor Dorcas Muga, the Guardian's Global Development Editor Tracy McVeigh and The Fuller Project's CEO Xanthe Scharff. The interviews not only explore the work of each of these organizations in improving gender equity in news coverage, but also lessons learned along the way and future plans for reducing gender inequity in news.

Case study: Khabar Lahariya in India

What is Khabar Lahariya?

Khabar Lahariya is a trailblazing and unique all-women news service in India which has been operating since 2002, telling stories from a feminist perspective. It delivers ultra-local journalism, focusing on the plight of underprivileged rural audiences who rarely feature in mainstream news. Khabar Lahariya has grown from an eight-page weekly newspaper with a circulation of 4,000 to a fully digitalized multi-platform news proposition reaching millions. It has 556,000 YouTube subscribers and c170 million cumulative views on YouTube²¹⁵, 20,100 Twitter followers²¹⁶ and 11,930 monthly unique visitors.²¹⁷ 462 websites have linked to Khabar Lahariya, eight of them educational.²¹⁸ To date, the organization has won 13 awards. From its launch, when women formed “hardly two or three percent” of its audience, the news provider has succeeded in reaching an increasingly gender-balanced audience, with women comprising 33% by 2016.²¹⁹ The latest gender profile data from SimilarWeb estimates that 46% of Khabar Lahariya’s website audience is currently female.²²⁰ Together with its parent company, Chambal Media, today the organization has a team of 30. Khabar Lahariya employs 20 full-time reporters from marginalized communities (including Dalit, Muslim, Tribal and Other Backward Castes), as well as women from the so-called upper castes. Many, including Kavita Devi, its Editor-in-Chief, are Dalit, previously characterized as “*untouchables*” – the most discriminated-against community in India. Three of Khabar Lahariya’s female reporters are the main protagonists in the 2021 Oscar-nominated documentary *Writing with Fire*.

When I speak with Kavita Devi and Outreach Manager Srishti Mehra, who interprets for us between Hindi and English, I am amazed by Devi’s warmth, by how lightly she seems to wear her ego, and by the friendly banter between the two women. Devi, a child bride at 12 and illiterate until that age, talks with passion and pride about the feminist vision and future direction of Khabar Lahariya.

A co-founder of the news service, Devi has been a part of Khabar Lahariya’s courageous journey of success for the past 20 years. She takes most pride in the fact that for two decades, despite financial and safety pressures, and the gender-, caste-, language- and education-based discrimination that reporters have encountered along the way, Khabar Lahariya has been able to deliver independent journalism relevant to rural audiences as an all-women-led organization. She considers “*the transition from pen to digital a massive achievement*.” Devi is also particularly proud of the Chambal Academy, a recently launched program which aims to train women in the journalism trade, imparting knowledge that once opened the door to journalism and professional fulfilment for Devi herself.

What makes Khabar Lahariya exceptional?

An egalitarian and highly collaborative culture

The management team, reporters, and staff at Khabar Lahariya are bound by a strong sense of community that “*drives and brings everyone together*”. Many of the reporters have been with the news service for at least a decade, which has meant that their sense of belonging there has deepened. Devi explains that there has never been a rigid hierarchy or a strong segregation of departments within the organization. No idea is ever dismissed, whoever its author. With the responsibilities in the organization shared, the culture is one of mutual learning and support for individual and collective growth. A lot of emphasis is placed on collaboration and learning.

215. YouTube data, March 2022

216. Twitter data, March 2022

217. SimilarWeb, February 2022

218. Ahrefs, February 2022

219. Ananya, 2016

220. SimilarWeb, February 2022

“Because it has been a long journey – we have naturally been through rough patches as a service and in our personal lives – we derive strength from the community. Our success has only been possible because we believe in teamwork and transparency. We can only grow and progress individually when we are together as a collective.”

Kavita Devi recognizes that a lot of organizations claim to do this, but at Khabar Lahariya these values are truly applied in practice.

A vision of delivering feminist journalism

Devi is crystal clear that the reporters and management are fully aligned around Khabar Lahariya’s vision of delivering what she describes as “*feminist journalism*”. She gives a broad and very inclusive definition of this as a journalism that strives to give equal voice not only to men and women, but to any community that is underrepresented or discriminated-against:

“We are feminist and believe in equality. When we were starting out and defined ourselves as feminist, there was usually the perception that we were anti-male or that we were against certain communities, but we have been very conscious not to be that. We approach every story and everything we do, through the lens of equality.”

Giving voice to the marginalized: as reporters or sources/protagonists

Devi denounces the negative impact of India’s rigid caste system on the professional growth opportunities for Indian journalists. She also denounces the undue emphasis Indian newsrooms place on how a person looks, how fluent their English is and which university they graduated from.

“None of these things are what makes a Khabar Lahariya journalist. And yet despite missing out on all these checkboxes, they are journalists, reporting on issues that audiences care about. This is what feminist journalism is.”

One of the immense strengths of Khabar Lahariya’s reporters is their lived experience and their connectedness to the problems of the communities they report on. This is a critical factor in the success of the news outlet. In Devi’s view, no one understands the issues of a community better than someone who comes from that community, so, for example, if a piece is about what it is like to be a Muslim woman in India, the person best placed to write it will be a Muslim woman.

Compassionate journalism: human-centered rather than headline-centered

Khabar Lahariya and Devi herself spend considerable amounts of time thinking about and protecting the safety of their reporters as well as pre-empting and/or mitigating the impact of their journalism on the protagonists of their stories. There have been times when a rural crime story has made it to the headlines of mainstream Indian news and where Khabar Lahariya’s reporters have worked alongside mainstream media reporters. On these occasions, Devi has seen a stark difference between Khabar Lahariya’s approach to stories and that of mainstream media reporters. For example, she has witnessed mainstream reporters “*bombard the victim’s family*” with requests, their pressing hunger for the story “*bite*” leading them to ignore all concerns for the family’s safety, privacy, and wellbeing. By contrast, Khabar Lahariya reporters had chosen to speak to the victim’s family at a later point with sensitivity and care.

“The lens of sensitivity and empathy for our own safety and for the safety of the people we report on, is something we are very conscious of and spend a long time discussing in training.”

What has Khabar Lahariya learned in its 20-year existence?

Khabar Lahariya has faced two principal challenges in the last two decades: securing financial stability and editorial independence and ensuring the safety of its journalists and sources.

Securing financial stability and editorial independence

Kavita Devi acknowledges that Khabar Lahariya has gone through its fair share of financial challenges in its two decades of existence. However, she talks with pride about the fact that all Khabar Lahariya reporters have been employed full-time until now. Devi understands the economic imperative for the women who join the organization - often as the sole earners in their family - to have a steady income. So she is hopeful to maintain this reporter-centric model of employment in the future as well as introducing a freelance model in states like Bihar where Khabar Lahariya is currently expanding.

In the interests of editorial independence, which forms the bedrock of Khabar Lahariya’s journalism, the leadership team made an early decision not to allow advertising on any of its properties, seeing this as potentially compromising. Khabar Lahariya’s current financial model consequently relies on partnerships with other newsrooms and NGOs, as well as on subscriptions. They offer a monthly, quarterly, or annual subscription of their premium product called *KL Hatke*, which is English content delivered on a bi-monthly basis.

Safety before the scoop: ensuring the safety of journalists and sources

Preparation and planning form a large part of Khabar Lahariya’s strategy for keeping its reporters and sources safe. The editorial approach is to plan for pressure points in advance of covering a story that is deemed sensitive. This pre-work on every story, whether it focuses on violence against women or on a political election, is seen as critical by the Khabar Lahariya team. Similar to great chess players, the pivotal question that Khabar Lahariya’s reporters ask themselves is: “*What could go wrong?*”²²¹ They then map out these risks and sensitivities, identifying whether they are to do with a potentially violent situation, likely distrust towards the reporters, or indeed simply a complex topic. Sometimes reporters are paired up on more sensitive stories as a safety measure. Because Khabar Lahariya reports extensively on marginalized communities, the editorial team is often concerned with the safety of their story protagonists and reporters are specifically trained to put the safety of the protagonists before the story scoop. The editorial team has also developed explainers and guidelines which are used in training reporters to cover different types of stories.

What next?

Looking ahead, Kavita Devi sees the subscription-based model as a major source of revenue in Khabar Lahariya’s future. She also envisages continuing to partner with other news or non-governmental organizations. Khabar Lahariya will remain an all-women organization which will deliver human-centric rural journalism in a culture defined by inclusivity, transparency, and a nurturing spirit. As a concrete expression of this, the Chambal Academy represents a huge source of excitement for Kavita Devi. The first training program which was piloted in 2021 has been a success, training 270 young

221. Tough, 2013

rural women in mobile journalism, audio, video production, and other media-related skills. Some of these women have already started writing stories for Khabar Lahariya in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, while others have secured internships and fellowships. Devi is thrilled to be expanding the network of empowered female journalists. She is also excited to have come full circle, taking forward what she loves doing most: independent feminist journalism, challenging those in power and holding the mic for people whose voices would never otherwise be heard.

Case study: Nation Media Group in Kenya

What is Nation Media Group?

Nation Media Group is the largest independent media house in East and Central Africa with operations in print, broadcast and digital media in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda. Its flagship newspaper *Daily Nation* is the largest print newspaper in the country and the second largest online.²²² It also publishes a monthly supplement, *The Voice*, that focuses on women protagonists and women's issues. *Daily Nation* reaches 1.4m monthly unique visitors online²²³, and has 753,000 YouTube subscribers and 2.8m Twitter followers. 40% of its audience are women.²²⁴ 53,436 external websites link to *Daily Nation*, of which 18 are governmental and 256 educational.²²⁵

In 2019, Nation Media Group launched Kenya's (and indeed Africa's) first Gender Desk – a news beat – under the leadership of Pamella Sittoni, who was Managing Editor at the time. The beat was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and launched in editorial partnership with The Fuller Project.

I speak with the Gender Desk's editor, Dorcas Muga, about Nation Media Group's pioneering work, the lessons learned in the last three years, and what she dreams of achieving in the future. While Muga is excited about the waves the Gender Desk has made in Kenya, she is ambivalent about Nation Media Group being the only news organization with a gender desk in Africa. She would rather see more media houses offering the gender lens in news to improve women's visibility and status in news and in society.

"It is exciting in the sense that we are pioneers, but it is also sad. You see: the more news houses cover gender stories the merrier, the more the gender agenda becomes a real issue to the media houses, stakeholders and policy-makers around the world."

What makes Nation Media Group exceptional?

Elevating women's voices as reporters, protagonists, and sources in Kenya

The launch of the Gender Desk has made a dent in the male-favoring society and has brought unique success to Nation Media Group through elevating women's voices and delivering a more gender-balanced vertical readership. Bylines in the Gender Desk are nearing parity (49%) vs 42% in Kenyan newsrooms.²²⁶ At the same time, a portrayal analysis of a sample of stories showed that 94% of experts featured in the Gender Desk stories were women²²⁷, in contrast to the 14% identified in the COVID stories that emerged from Kenya in 2020.²²⁸ Women's share of voice in Gender Desk stories in 2020 was 59%, much higher than, for example, the 22% recorded on nation.africa.²²⁹

Trailblazing new ways of gender-based reporting, picked up by other media

The launch of the Gender Desk has enabled Nation Media Group to ramp up their reporting on important gender-based issues such as violence against women. For example, for the last three years, during the annual *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence* campaign, Muga has been

222. Reuters, 2021

223. SimilarWeb, February 2022

224. SimilarWeb, Desktop and mobile demographics – Gender, Traffic-share as of February 2022

225. Ahrefs, 21st March 2022

226. Hanitzsch et al., 2019

227. AKAS/The Fuller Project portrayal analysis of Gender Desk stories in 2021, AKAS 2022

228. Kassova, 2020b

229. AKAS/The Fuller Project analysis using Google search engine, Google search analysis of NMG urls, AKAS, 2022



given a page each day in the flagship *Daily Nation* print newspaper to feature stories dedicated to highlighting the problems and solutions surrounding gender-based violence. She has noticed that in the last year or two other media, such as *The Standard*, have emulated the approach taken by the *Daily Nation* by featuring their own women-centric content more prominently.

“Now more media houses are talking about women’s issues, after seeing what The Nation is doing, which helps socialize the issue of marginalization of women in society.”

Sensitizing the newsroom to the need for gender-based reporting

In 2019, in advance of launching the Gender Desk, Nation Media Group conducted gender-sensitivity training with all its reporters and editors, an action which Muga assesses as pivotal in paving the way for the successful launch of the beat. The training created momentum and broke down some of the barriers to women-centric reporting that exist, especially among male journalists/editors. Some got so excited that they even started submitting their own story ideas. However, according to Muga, this momentum is now in need of a velocity boost, having been somewhat interrupted during the pandemic.

“Yes, we have made some strides, but there is still a lot of room for improvement,”

Muga reflects, emphasizing the critical importance of ongoing gender-sensitivity training in the newsroom.

“Ongoing sensitization to gender issues at all levels is very, very important. We need to do it regularly for people (especially for anti-feminists) to accept that we have to tell women’s stories.”

If training is not offered on an ongoing basis, the default male lens for looking at the world draws journalists back into their familiar bias, leaving women’s voices on the margins.

Impacting policy making

One of the key successes that Dorcas Muga identifies following the launch of the Gender Desk is the fact that policy-making bodies in Kenya have “*noticed the work*” that the beat is doing and are alerting the editorial team to various events happening in the country. Moreover, the government has made tangible policy changes as a result of Gender Desk story coverage, which is a source of pride for Muga.

What has Nation Media Group learned along the way?

Giving women experts more advance notice

*The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*²³⁰ report found that at 20%, women’s share of voice as experts, protagonists or sources in Kenya is 3.7 times smaller than that of men. I ask Muga how the Gender Desk goes about finding women experts, particularly for higher-profile subjects such as politics, business, and health. While she acknowledges the structural challenge that results from there being a smaller pool of women experts in these areas, Muga also highlights some successful ways of securing women’s contributions as news experts or sources. She has observed that one important requirement is to give women more advance notice than men. In her view, men are more than ready to show up at short notice. Women, on the other hand, face gender-based challenges such as the need to organize childcare or to ensure that they look as presentable as possible because social opinion judges their looks harshly, unlike those of men.

“When their photos appear in the paper and their hair is not well done, social media is all over it, judging them for being a prominent woman who looks bad.”

So, giving women more time to prepare or even pre-record their segments, and reassuring them of the importance of featuring their stories, allows women to organize their time and appearance in a way that allows them to participate in panels or contribute to news stories.

Unlocking the pool of women protagonists in business and politics news

A significant pool of businesswomen protagonists became available to Nation Media Group when journalists reframed the way they defined this category. They broadened the definition from well-recognized women – “*The ‘Bill Gates’ of women in Africa*” – to ordinary women who own small and medium-sized businesses, of whom there are many: the women who generate \$1,000 a year; or those who sell fruit and vegetables on the streets. Telling the stories of these women is as important to the Gender Desk as showcasing the uber-successful role model businesswomen.

Muga explains that being an election year, 2022 presented a great opportunity for the Gender Desk to amplify the voices of the women who were vying for political seats. To do so, the Gender Desk not only profiled female candidates in the *Daily Nation’s* monthly print pull-out *The Voice* in a column titled *The Aspirant*, but also covered up to three candidates online weekly in the months preceding

230. Kassova, 2020a

the election. It had come as something of a shock to Muga to find her WhatsApp/inbox inundated by women eager to tell their stories when this column was launched.

The need for a gender champion in every company department

Besides the need for ongoing gender-sensitivity training, which Muga believes should be extended beyond the editorial team, she also sees value in establishing gender champions in different company departments as a way of helping the organization's culture facilitate gender equity. This idea came about after Muga noticed that colleagues from different departments had started approaching her about gender-based issues, zoning in on maternity leave or the need to allocate a private space for breastfeeding mothers.

What next?

Muga is looking forward to a time when the Gender Desk will have the resources to carve out a dedicated space for a small team of journalists who will focus their efforts exclusively on gender investigative pieces (protected from the relentless daily news cycle), producing work that will generate even bigger local, national, and international impact. She believes that going forward, it is important to include gender-based reporting more prominently on television, as the most powerful platform in the multimedia mix. Muga's personal dream is to create an empowering current affairs strand covering forums which feature ordinary women from across Kenya in discussion with experts, focusing on important topics such as the negative impact of early marriage or the importance of education.

Case study: The Fuller Project in the US – a global remit

What is The Fuller Project?

The Fuller Project is a global non-profit newsroom which is dedicated to reporting on issues that impact women. It has 16,400 Twitter followers and a website that attracts 18,700 monthly unique users.²³¹ 1,100 external websites link to its website²³², 15 of them educational.²³³ Women make up 51% of the project's website traffic.²³⁴ Through partner sites, The Fuller Project achieves considerably greater reach: its coverage of Afghanistan for instance netted 3.85 million+ impressions on Twitter and 83K+ profile visits²³⁵ in August and September 2021.

From small beginnings, with just two stories at its inception seven years ago, The Fuller Project has since published over 300 stories. In 2021, it produced more than 100 stories through investigative and enterprise reporting, and collaborated with 23 outlets around the world, from *TIME* to the *Lesotho Times*, reaching more than 10 million readers. Astoundingly, approximately 1 in 10 of their stories received an industry award (achieving 11 industry awards in 2021 alone). The team has grown from a loose network of freelancers to 16 full-time staff and many editorial contributors, 92% of whom are women.

I speak with The Fuller Project's CEO Xanthe Scharff, who co-founded the organization in Istanbul in 2015 in response to women's increasing disempowerment in Turkey (and Syria) under President Erdogan's autocracy. We discuss the newsroom's global pioneering work, what they have learned in the last seven years and what lies ahead. Scharff is resolved to accelerate progress in amplifying women's voices in the news,

"especially those facing race and identity bias, who have been left out of news and mainstream narratives for centuries. History is written without women's voices. The barriers and harms they face are considered tangential – instead of central to security, economic, legal, environmental, and other issues that impact everyone."

What makes The Fuller Project exceptional?

Impact-driven journalism

"*Impact is our north star*" shares Scharff.

"That means that we aim to do journalism that makes a difference, whether in terms of spurring policy change, informing our audience, or exposing abuses."

By telling stories about women and the barriers they face daily, The Fuller Project's journalism raises awareness about systemic and structural inequalities that disproportionately impact women, inspiring action in response. Since 2015, their investigations have led to tangible changes in multiple areas: changes in policy to address child trafficking; in pushing for historic new levels of funding for maternal care; in banning abusive practices; driving news cycles and front pages; and leading to large

231. SimilarWeb, February 2022

232. Ahrefs, March 2022

233. Ahrefs, 21 March 2022

234. SimilarWeb, Desktop and mobile demographics, traffic share as at February 2022

235. The Fuller Project estimates provided on 22nd April 2022



Jessie (Kai Tsehay: The Fuller Project)

scale releases of data. Their reporting brings not only a gender lens to the journalism, but often also prompts editors to re-think the framing of stories.

Investigative and enterprise reporting across beats

The focus of The Fuller Project's newsroom is on investigative and enterprise reporting that centers on women. Collectively, the team has expertise in gender issues that span areas from health to violence to climate.

"The reporters don't parachute in or chase headlines. They are on the ground before a story breaks, and stay long after other news organizations move on."

They bring context, history, and a systems-lens to produce reporting that makes a difference.

Globally relevant and locally rooted journalism

One of the distinctive features of The Fuller Project's journalism is the connections it makes between the local and the global, driven by the belief that what happens to a woman in one part of the world affects women everywhere. Scharff believes that the common factor in some of their greatest successes is the linkages they have found between women's experiences across the globe.

She argues that global news is often driven by the assumed perspective of a US audience that has limited knowledge about the world. The Fuller Project challenges this with reporting that is rooted in marginalized communities both globally and across the US. Audiences are invited to engage with global issues in a way that is informed from on the ground, with authentic sources and local journalists producing reports that are then shaped by editors in the region.

For example, in a story about supply chain disruptions The Fuller Project profiled two women, a JCPenney employee in California and a garment factory worker in Lesotho, whose livelihoods had been destroyed by the collapse of the retail industry. They wanted readers to understand how two women's lives — in two very different worlds — were inextricably linked. The story, with a rare global angle, has been published by the Associated Press and picked up by more than 100 news outlets globally and within the US.

Partnerships make the global-local link possible

Partnerships are central to The Fuller Project's model because they support local reporting, deep sourcing, and a connection to audiences in the places where the newsroom reports. Through partnerships they also foster a community of editors and reporters who together are disrupting bias in news.

In some contexts, such as Kenya's Nation Media Group, The Fuller Project has a staff reporter embedded in the partner newsroom. Here, they were able to support the launch of a Gender Desk and subsequently provide global coverage of issues affecting women. Co-reporting, co-editing, and co-publishing makes the journalism locally rooted but also globally relevant. Its success often rests on cross-publishing reports for both a regional and a global audience.

Xanthe Scharff reflects with pride on the Nation Media Group partnership. The deep expertise in gender reporting that The Fuller Project brought to the collaboration through their embedded reporter has supported the Gender Desk's efforts to redefine the standard for reporting on women in Kenya, bringing global stories about women to their audience.

"We brought our co-reported journalism to global outlets such as The Guardian, The Telegraph and Foreign Policy, elevating the prestige of the Gender Desk and the gender reporters within the broader company, contextualizing locally-rooted reporting for a global audience, and spurring impact with reporting that was noted, engaged with, and acted upon by a large number of policy influencers."

Staying on a story to provide a fuller account when others have moved on

Since its founding, the expertise of local contributors has enabled The Fuller Project to report on the ways in which US and global policymakers fail to listen to, protect or serve women during warfare. Building on years of reporting in Afghanistan, many months before the US withdrawal, they partnered with the women-led Afghan newsroom Rukhshana Media to launch an enterprise series in *TIME* magazine. When Kabul fell, The Fuller Project broadened this series to include urgent dispatches from women across the country, amplifying the voices of ordinary women — students, journalists, dressmakers, and pharmacists, among others. Instead of ending their coverage a month or two after the Taliban takeover like many other news outlets, the editors maintain daily contact with Afghan women reporters, and The Fuller Project is still reporting on women's day-to-day lives under the Taliban: their challenges, their fight, their strength.

Contributor Zahra Nader, a former New York Times reporter and the first Afghan woman to report for a western news outlet, led The Fuller Project's Afghanistan reporting. She appeared on *CNN Newsroom*, *MSNBC's The Week with Joshua Johnson*, and *Democracy Now*, among others, to discuss the experiences of women on the ground in Afghanistan.

What has The Fuller Project learned along the way?

Sustainability rests on building up all organizational functions

According to Scharff, many young non-profits invest all their capital in their journalism. But ultimately, this works against their potential for long-term sustainability and more significant growth.

"Like many early-stage non-profit newsrooms, for years we invested almost exclusively in our reporting. We have learned the importance of building the other functions of the organization that support the potential for impact and sustainability."

Additionally, as a newsroom that focuses on impact, The Fuller Project decided to develop its capacity to communicate about its journalism (rather than just produce it) through evidence gathering and external communications.

Pitching stories centered around gender issues requires time and editorial guidance

I ask Scharff about the difficulties of pitching women-centered stories in an industry that sees gender story angles as less relevant to audiences, barely covering them. She acknowledges that when The Fuller Project was first formed, many of the reporters experienced this issue in their freelance work.

“However, since we built a platform and set up a model where reporters would have time, editorial guidance and support; and resources to do deep enterprise and investigative journalism, we have had no issue placing our stories or building partnerships with news outlets.”

Her conclusion is that when there is investment in reporting about women, the journalism that results is revelatory, engaging and read by a wide audience, making editors want the story.

How to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes in reporting

One of the reasons Scharff set up The Fuller Project was to counteract women’s frequent portrayal in the news

“as victims and by family status, which propels harmful stereotypes about victimization.”

To avoid reinforcing these stereotypes, the project’s journalism is produced by expert reporters who are well-versed in their beats and local contexts. They carve out time to go beyond the surface of the story to uncover layers of history and context.

Similar to Khabar Lahariya’s humane and source-centric approach, The Fuller Project’s reporting centers on their sources’ lived experiences, reported by journalists who are immersed in the sources’ communities. Moreover, the reporters are deliberate in being thoughtful and respectful of how they project the images and voices of the sources in their stories. *“We do not chase headlines”*, Scharff affirms definitively.

No less important in combating stereotypes is the diversity of the team. The Fuller Project newsroom limits the blind spots in coverage that can lead to stereotypes by actively welcoming the informed and editorial perspectives of its diverse team.

What next?

Xanthe Scharff is resolute that The Fuller Project’s vision will remain steadfast:

“journalism that fully represents women, giving readers The Full Story, and spurring gender equality.”

The Fuller Project will continue working on ramping up its newsroom and growing the impact of its journalism. *“Where there is injustice against women, The Fuller Project is there, exposing the story and spurring positive change.”* There is no doubting Scharff’s determination that the newsroom will be a global beacon for reporting that lifts women’s stories from their communities clear of any noise.

Case study: The Guardian's *Her Stage*

The Guardian's Global Development website, which is a vertical of the Guardian newspaper, is dedicated to global development issues. Gender equity is a significant area of its focus and in January 2022, under the leadership of the site's editor Tracy McVeigh, the website launched the newsletter *Her Stage*, to cover issues relevant to women but in a way that is also accessible to men. The newsletter is published on a roughly monthly basis.

The wider Guardian website is the third most-read English-speaking newspaper online in the world.²³⁶ It reaches 92m monthly unique visitors²³⁷, has 1.9m YouTube subscribers and 10.5m Twitter followers on its main account.²³⁸ 44% of its traffic is women.²³⁹ 1.2 million external websites link to the Guardian, of which 1,066 are governmental and 6,593 educational²⁴⁰, making it one of the most linked-to news providers in the world. Of the external websites linking to the Guardian, nearly 67,000 link to the Global Development website - 832 educational and 63 governmental.²⁴¹

An analysis by AKAS of the volume of feminine vs masculine pronouns ("she said" vs. "he said") used in news coverage on the Guardian's Global Development website between 1st January and 10th June 2022 uncovered that the phrase "she said" received a 49% share of the total (vs. 36% in the Guardian as a whole). This indicates near-gender parity in the use of experts, sources, and protagonists on the Global Development website. Gender parity has been exceeded in the vertical in terms of bylines, with women contributing to 51% of all bylines. Unusually, a large majority of the journalists in the global development team (83%) are women, which represents an inverse picture to that of the foreign desk, 83% of whose staff are men. The proportion of women in the Global Development desk is also double the global average for poverty and development beats, where 39% of the journalists in 2019 globally were women.²⁴²

Her Stage newsletter focuses on issues relevant to women in developing countries and targets unique audiences to complement the Guardian's statistically older and slightly more male readers. I speak with Tracy McVeigh about her editorial vision for *Her Stage*; what she has learned since the launch of the newsletter; and the gender issues within the wider news industry. I am taken by her distinctive honesty, unburdened by self-censorship, and by her understated demeanor that is so out of sync with the significant role she plays in such a prestigious brand.

What makes the Guardian's *Her Stage* exceptional?

McVeigh highlights two key measures of success that the Guardian tracks (among others) for *Her Stage*. The first is sign-up rates; the second, open rates. "*The open rate is the more important one*", she clarifies. Quantitative analysis of the open rates of *Her Stage* points to a much higher engagement than that expected according to established industry benchmarks. The average open rate for *Her Stage* so far has been 65% vs. an average of between 15% and 25% for industry newsletters.²⁴³ The sign-up rate has grown threefold in the five months since the newsletter's launch.

236. Majit, 2022

237. SimilarWeb, May 2022

238. YouTube and Twitter audience figures as of 10 June 2022

239. SimilarWeb traffic share, as of 10 June 2022

240. Ahrefs, 21 March 2022

241. Ahrefs, 10 June 2022

242. ICFJ, 2019

243. Othen, 2021; Campaign Monitor, 2022

Targeting an audience beyond the Guardian's core readership

Her Stage aims to attract and engage an audience that falls outside the Guardian's "core audience", targeting audiences in African countries and India. The stories are carefully curated by McVeigh so that, while focusing on women sources and protagonists, they in no way alienate men.

"I think it's a lot easier to sell a newsletter that pops into somebody's email. It's very bright, it's very mixed in tone. You could be engaged in that newsletter, I hope, all the way to the bottom before realizing that it is, perhaps, a woman's place, a woman's newsletter", she explains. "I didn't want it to be a women-only space. I wanted it to be a women-dominated space, but not exclusive. So it felt that the format of a newsletter worked. It fitted into the work we were already doing and fed into what we were trying to do."

Bringing in voices that nobody has heard before

McVeigh explains that the newsletter is proving a good vehicle for driving two goals simultaneously: introducing more indigenous women writers and photographers as Guardian Global Development website bylines, and investigating more deeply the lives of women in the developing world. These were the reasons behind McVeigh's decision to target less established women writers and, unlike other newsletter publishers, to steer away from big names in the op-eds.

"The idea is to try and bring voices that nobody's heard before."

I ask McVeigh what she is most proud of in the context of the site's coverage of gender equity and she singles out her team's dedication to amplifying women's voices in their storytelling. This is borne out by the statistics already cited, which shine a light on how much more gender-balanced the Global Development website's coverage is than the benchmarks reported in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News/COVID-19 News*.

"Most of the reporters on the team here wouldn't even think twice about making sure their stories are full of women. And actually, a news journalist, a home news journalist, often wouldn't even think about that. But I think, within this team, people are thinking about that all the time. And some of it has to do with representation. We do have a heavily female team."

What are the learnings along the way?

"All the issues are women's issues". Pushing men out of the conversation would be damaging

I ask McVeigh why she chose to launch a newsletter instead of a vertical or a column dedicated to women's issues. Her answer is rich, alluding to past deliberations:

"I have always felt slightly uncomfortable with this idea of women's issues, because women are 50% of the population. All the issues are women's issues. And in order to achieve proper equality, issues have to stop being called 'women's issues'. If you don't have men as part of that journey towards equality, we will never achieve equality. It has to be an inclusive place."

McVeigh offers evidence of the critical role that men have in solving issues that affect women exclusively, such as FGM [female genital mutilation].

“I think that siloing women’s issues is not the way to go. Obviously, there are issues, like abortion, like reproductive rights, that are more important to women, but also, I think if we push men out of that conversation, we’re not going to win the battles. We must have men involved, otherwise we’re never going to get anywhere. FGM is a perfect example. I was in Kenya a few months ago, looking at FGM. I was stunned by how many men were involved in the anti-FGM movement. Dads, young activists. It was remarkable to look at how many men were there. And it felt really powerful.”

Gender balance in reporting: “I have interviewed a man, I need to look for a woman”

While the Guardian Global Development website does not have targets for the proportion of women bylines, sources, experts or protagonists, the success in achieving gender parity or near-parity could in part be attributed to the reporting culture within the team, where considering the gender of quoted sources is innate. In McVeigh’s words:

“I think only once on this desk I’ve had to say: ‘Actually, that’s disproportionately male’. And that was when I’d asked somebody to gather a whole lot of voices and they’d gathered something like 80% men, and so we didn’t run it. I think most people do automatically think: ‘Okay, I’ve interviewed a man, I need to go and look for a woman’.”

The missing women of color in the news

As we discuss the culture of awareness of the diversity of sources, McVeigh candidly recalls an incident early in her career when she had not included a person of color in a story she was about to file and was emailed by someone she did not know to make her aware of the fact. I ask her how well the news industry in the UK covers issues relevant to women of color now. *“I think appallingly,”* is her immediate response. She goes on to clarify:

“If you do not have representation in your organization, then you will always be on the back foot when it comes to being on top of those issues. I think that’s a problem. Newspapers [in the UK], traditionally, have been places where Oxbridge white men have kind of cut their teeth and sat around and rubbed their chins and talked about the great issues of the day. Obviously, that’s changing, and for the better and there’s some wonderful people working here who don’t have those kinds of backgrounds, but there’s still that problem.”

“There is nothing more to say about gender equality here.” The persistent gender blindness in the news industry

According to McVeigh, a key barrier to increasing the volume of news coverage dedicated to gender equality issues is the misperception, reported in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*, that the gender inequality problem has been resolved. Her observation is insightful:

“Journalists go: ‘Nothing to see here. Of course, you’ve got equal pay, of course you’ve got maternity leave. I couldn’t sack you if I wanted to.’ Despite the facts, which clearly show it’s not the case, I think there’s a genuine belief that there’s nothing more to say here.”

Misogyny is keeping women off news platforms. News organizations must be watchdogs

Perhaps most depressingly, McVeigh brings up another structural problem which the news industry faces at present. Namely, platform capture on social media, which allows the large-scale abuse of primarily women journalists.²⁴⁴

244. See “The double-edged sword of technological advancements”, p. 55 in Kassova, 2020a

“Women are less keen to stick their heads above the parapet, for very obvious reasons. They get shut off a lot of times, whether on social media, on TV, even in newspapers. The misogyny is successfully keeping women off those platforms, I’d say, very successfully. I don’t say anything controversial on social media at all, unless I’m really angry, because I just don’t want to invite that kind of nastiness, because I carry it about with me.”

She too touches on the childcare barrier highlighted by Dorcas Muga in the Nation Media Group’s case study in Kenya. According to McVeigh, women journalists are less likely than men to be able to accommodate out of hours media requests because of clashes with their childcare responsibilities.

From an organizational perspective, McVeigh sees the solution lying in news leadership demanding that their output is gender-balanced.

“And then for journalists, and TV producers, and radio, who I think are the worst offenders at not giving women the air they need, they need to be forced, they need somebody who turns and says, ‘Hang on a minute, this isn’t going out until you get a proper gender mix’ on this board, or panel, or discussion. Everybody needs to be watchdogging this.”

What next?

Assuming the newsletter continues to perform well, McVeigh’s future vision for *Her Stage* is for it to get its own dedicated editor. She believes it could do with its own voice. In the ideal scenario, McVeigh would find two or three women in the developing world who would guest-edit it on the ground, curating its feature stories, and writing the op-ed.

What would McVeigh change right now about the news industry to improve women’s representation, inclusion, or portrayal in the news, I ask. Her response is unique and profound. It highlights the systemic economic barriers that women journalists from certain backgrounds face from the outset in their attempts to enter the profession.

“Making housing cheaper in London. Because if you’re a young woman of Bangladeshi origin, who’s just gone to journalism school in Manchester, you have got very little chance of coming to work in a London newspaper. You can’t afford to come down and do the work experience. You can’t live in London unless you’re lucky enough to have a friend. You can’t come here and get into an industry in the way that other wealthier young people can. So there’s actual physical, economic barriers to an awful lot of people coming into this industry. There were for me, there’s an awful lot, and that’s not gone away. In fact, it’s probably getting worse.” It is these systemic disadvantages that McVeigh would like to eliminate first.