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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

# The report at a glance

## Executive summary

The perception that women have almost caught up with men in news leadership and coverage strengthens further with every high-profile editorial appointment of a woman in journalism. Nonetheless, this perception is wrong. **Women are significantly underrepresented in editorial leadership roles and news coverage and their voices remain muted in a global news industry still dominated by men. However, substantive opportunities to reshape the status quo are emerging.**

This independent, solutions-based report, the third in the *Missing Perspectives* series, focuses on **how to break down two fundamental barriers**, previously identified, **that women face**: their **underrepresentation and cultural exclusion in news leadership** at the top of news organizations/in the highest-profile beats (the subject of **Part 1**); and their **invisibility in news coverage/storytelling** (the subject of **Part 2**).

The report findings are based on research in the same six countries featured in previous reports: India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US. The AKAS team has accessed millions of data points from multiple quantitative methodologies to derive insights and formulate solutions. This time, however, we also conducted in-depth interviews with 41 senior news editors/editors-in-chief and trailblazers from around the world to understand the root causes of and, importantly, the palpable solutions to removing these two key barriers to progress.

When tackling this longstanding issue of women's missing perspectives in news, organizations and leaders often expect to identify a silver bullet, a quick fix that can solve the problem. **The truth is: there is no silver bullet.** While hiring more women leaders is an imperative starting point, it is simply not enough to resolve the issue. To accelerate change, women's **missing or muted voices must be amplified at each stage of the news value chain**: i.e. in news leadership and newsrooms, in newsgathering, in news coverage, and in news consumption. Moreover, **to improve gender and racial equity in news, organizations should drive change at the individual level**, as typically happens now, but also **at two other levels: the systemic and organizational** (see **Part 3**).

Provided this strategic approach is adopted, **our investigation into the business case for gender equality shows** a potential cumulative revenue opportunity of \$43 billion between 2023 and 2027 and \$83 billion between 2023 and 2032 for the global newspaper industry if the 11-12 percentage point addressable gender consumption gap was completely closed. Realistically, the gap could only be closed incrementally. If each year the gap was reduced by one percentage point, **over the next five years new women audiences would generate \$11 billion and over ten years \$ 38 billion** (see **Part 4, Chapter 2**).

## Three new insights require the news industry's urgent attention:

**Firstly, women are still very much on the margins of editorial decision-making in the highest-profile news beats.** For every woman who is an editor-in-chief, there are between two (in South Africa, the US and the UK) and 12 (in Indian regional news outlets) male editors-in-chief. Across the key beats of business, politics, and foreign affairs, women hold as few as 1 in 6 editorial roles in the countries researched. Occasional instances of parity (e.g. in South African political editors or in US business editors) are counterbalanced by exclusively male leadership (e.g. among Kenyan and Indian regional political editors) (**see Part 1, Chapters 1 to 6**).

**Secondly, women news leaders of color suffer extraordinary marginalization in countries with multi-racial populations** i.e. South Africa, the UK, and the US. This is a news industry blind spot. AKAS' research showed that women of color are often completely locked out of editorial decision-making in the highest-profile beats. In all three countries examined, their representation is significantly below their proportion in the working population. In the UK, no people of color occupy the most senior editorial decision-making positions in politics and health news beats and no women of color occupy the most senior editorial positions in foreign affairs beats. Only 3% of political and 4% of foreign affairs editors in the US are women of color. Even in South Africa, just 29% of political editors are women of color, while their proportion in the working population is 46% (**see Part 1, Chapters 2-6**). These troubling findings were backed up by our interviews, which revealed that the harrowing experiences of women of color are mostly a test of endurance, and the enormous challenges they face demand immediate action (**see Part 1, Chapter 7**). Currently news leadership teams are either unaware, reactive, pushing back, or turning a blind eye to the problem. Moreover, women of color's representation or cultural inclusion in news organizations is simply not tracked. Only 2% of the diversity reports

produced by news organizations across South Africa, the UK, and the US release statistics on women of color (**see Part 5**).

**Thirdly, there is a huge gap in the coverage of issues that affect women disproportionately.** A meagre 0.02% of news coverage globally focuses on seven substantive gaps between men and women in pay, power, safety, authority, confidence, health, and ageism. The scarce coverage of the health gap is particularly worrying given women's parity in editorial decision-making in that beat. The existing male-favoring news-making norms, which transcend the gender of the editors, obscure women-sensitive story angles (**see Part 2**). To widen the storytelling lens, women's inclusion in editorial decision-making and as news contributors must improve dramatically. *"Just [having women in] many leadership positions is not the only solution. You need women's voices to be heard, and, when women are in leadership positions, for them to be in meaningful positions."* How to achieve that has been a significant focus of this study (**see Part 1, Chapters 7-9**).

Optimistically, the **report outlines 12 solutions themes that are available not only to change the status quo and improve women's representation and inclusion in news leadership, but also to create more balanced, and inclusive news coverage that engages more female and racially-diverse audiences** (**see Summary of solutions themes**). A latent revenue opportunity is waiting to be unlocked through more gender-inclusive journalism that engages more female audiences (**see Part 1, Chapter 9 and Part 2, Chapter 3**). Trailblazing organizations, nine of which are profiled in this report, including some of the world's largest news organizations such as Bloomberg, the Guardian and The New York Times, are making progress already. Drop by drop the river rises. Every one percentage point change along any element of the news value chain, starting with a gender audit, will bring news organizations a small step closer to a more equitable and profitable journalism. To learn more, read the report...



# Summary of solutions themes for news organizations

A checklist of key interventions to improve women's representation and inclusion in news leadership, coverage, consumption, and impact

## Solutions themes in the news value chain

Change area for gender parity along the news value chain



1. Consolidate efforts at an industry level to enhance progress

2. Conduct an audit of the existing gender balance along all the elements of the news value chain. Intersect gender with race/ethnicity

3. Make the goal of pursuing gender balance in your news organization and coverage explicit in the organization's strategy

4. Improve the representation of all women in news leadership

5. Improve specifically the representation of women of color in news leadership

6. Improve the inclusion of women in news leadership decision-making

7. Improve specifically the inclusion of women of color in news leadership decision-making

8. Improve the representation and inclusion of women in newsrooms. Implement recommendations on gender diversity in the workplace for newsrooms from the "Gender Parity in News checklist" in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* report

9. Improve the representation of all women as contributors, especially experts and protagonists

10. Ensure that storytelling is relevant to women by utilizing a vertical or/ and horizontal editorial approach. Tackle the seven gender gaps when telling stories

11. Measure and improve portrayal of all women in news coverage (currently mainly reinforcing stereotypes)

12. Reframe the case for change to include the significant business opportunity that gender parity in news consumption will bring

In writing this report, 12 solutions themes emerged. Many stemmed from generous conversations with the 41 senior news leaders interviewed. Others grew from insights generated through content, quantitative, and qualitative analyses or from studying the case studies of trailblazing organizations. **This checklist is a selection of the most pivotal actions.** For a full list, please visit **Part 5** of this report.

## **News sector level:**

### **1. Consolidate efforts at an industry level to enhance progress**

- Set up a body that unifies all working in this area under the umbrella of the gender equity cause. Non-profits and associations working to improve women's position in news should collaborate more and compete less
- Develop industry-wide initiatives that aim to understand women audiences

## **News organizational level:**

### **2. Conduct a comprehensive gender diversity audit across all elements of the news operation**

- Conduct an audit of the existing gender balance and news initiatives for women/ women of color along all the elements of the value chain

### **3. Make the gender diversity strategy explicit**

- Make the goal of pursuing gender balance in your news organization and coverage explicit in the organization's strategy

## **News leadership level:**

### **4. Improve the representation of all women in news leadership**

- Raise awareness that male-favoring norms prevail in society and in journalism
- Be intentional about change at all levels within your news organization by setting targets and measuring representation

continuously along the whole news value chain

- Challenge the persistent soft vs. hard news gender stereotyping that keeps women out of editorial roles in high-profile beats such as politics, economics, and foreign affairs
- Develop talent retention programs, especially for mid-level managers

### **5. Improve specifically the representation of women of color in news leadership**

- Think about representation intersectionally. Measure women's representation intersectionally to understand the role of race and ethnicity when overlaid onto gender
- Review recruitment and retention processes to accommodate diverse talent
- Establish and measure targets for representation and inclusion of women of color

### **6. Improve the inclusion of all women in decision-making in news leadership**

- Ensure everyone understands that a more diverse team does not automatically translate into inclusive decision-making
- Consciously tone down the competitive "win-lose" journalistic values inside the newsroom to create a more empathetic culture
- Allyship is key. Encourage/launch support groups for women, with men on board
- Use employee engagement surveys to measure employees' and leaders' perceived inclusion
- Launch interventions that specifically support individual women's safety and wellbeing

### **7. Improve specifically the inclusion of women of color in decision-making in news leadership**

- Beware of knee-jerk reactions to external trigger events which lead to superficial solutions
- Educate yourself about the taxing experiences of women of color in your news organization

- When considering a DEI initiative, bring in experts to run it, rather than allocating it to staff with lived experiences but no formalized expertise
- Do not expect women or ethnic minority groups to lead and resolve their own underrepresentation or exclusion. Offer to support. Take initiative
- If you are a woman of color, do not take on DEI initiatives if this is too emotionally taxing
- Measure and track the success of DEI initiatives. Establish baselines before the initiatives start

## **Newsroom and journalism level:**

### **8. Improve the representation and inclusion of women in newsrooms**

- Implement recommendations for gender diversity in the workplace from the “Gender Parity in News Checklist” in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* report (p. 166)

## **Newsgathering/news coverage:**

### **9. Improve the representation of all women in news coverage**

- Focus on circumventing the five key biases in journalism (status quo, male bias leading to gender blindness, short-term outlook, reductive journalism, organizations’ unwillingness to report on themselves)
- Measure the impact of your women-centric journalism
- Make your newsroom more inclusive and accessible through outreach training
- Ensure the sustainability of interventions to diversify contributors and protagonists: keep them simple, get backing from both the top and the grassroots, and, ideally, make them voluntary

### **10. Improve storytelling about women of all colors**

- Look for story angles that appeal to both women and men
- Use more micro angles in storytelling, including human stories to make macro stories relevant
- Increase news coverage of seven gender gaps (in power, pay, safety, authority, confidence, health, and ageism), which are wider for people of color
- Introduce inclusive storytelling and 360 degree editing to encompass the perspectives of different communities and audience groups on how a particular story affects them

### **11. Improve the portrayal of all women in news coverage**

- Recognize that the portrayal of women of all colors in the news is an industry blind spot
- Start measuring the use of common gender or racial stereotypes in your news coverage
- Focus on expertise rather than identity when interviewing women contributors
- Conduct portrayal analyses to understand how news contributors/protagonists are portrayed

## **News consumption and impact:**

### **12. Reframe the case for change to include the business opportunity of targeting women audiences**

- Develop a business plan for increasing revenue from women audiences whilst still retaining men’s readership
- Research and develop women-friendly news products and formats
- Track women’s engagement and consumption
- Track the impacts of any new strategy (on finance, brand, individuals, influencers, and decision-makers)





# Summary of key findings

## **Part 1: Narrowing the diversity and inclusion gap in news leadership in the highest-profile editorial beats. The problems and the solutions**

### **Chapter 1: Gender and racial diversity of top news leaders in organizations**

- 1 in 4 editors-in-chief (26%) across the six countries of focus (India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US) are women. This is marginally lower than the global average more than a decade ago. There has been divergence across countries.
- For every woman who is an editor-in-chief, there are between two (in South Africa, the US and the UK) and 12 (in Indian regional news outlets) male editors-in-chief. The proportion of women editors-in-chief is highest in South Africa and the UK (37%) and lowest in India (11% in national and 8% in regional). In the US, Nigeria, and Kenya, the proportions are 35%, 18%, and 19% respectively.
- Only 2% (1) of the 45 researched diversity reports of news organizations across South Africa, the UK, and the US report on women of color. Yet the introduction of an intersectional lens between gender and race in these countries has revealed the extraordinary extent of women of color's invisibility at a societal, news industry, and news organizational level. Their absence or severe underrepresentation in key editorial roles, and the cultural exclusion, gaslighting, burnout, and long-term suffering they experience demand urgent reform.

### **Chapter 2: Gender and racial diversity of top editors across high-profile beats (politics, business, foreign affairs, and health)**

- Women have achieved gender parity among the most senior editors in health beats across five of the six countries, but in business and politics beats only 1 in 3 and 1 in 4 are women. 1 in 3 foreign affairs editors in the UK and the US are women. This discrepancy reconfirms the longstanding gender segregation of editorial jobs, assigning “soft” beats to women and “hard” beats, from which editor-in-chief roles are recruited, to men.
- In the UK, no women of color occupy the most senior editorial decision-making positions in the key high-profile news beats of politics, foreign affairs, and health. Women of color are severely marginalized in the US compared to their proportion in the working population: 3%, 4%, 6%, and 9% of the political, foreign, health, and economics/business editors in the US are women of color, which is 7, 5, 4, and 2 times fewer than their proportion in the working population. In South Africa, if the representation of women of color in editorial roles matched their proportion in the working population, the number of women of color would be 2 times higher in economics/business editor roles, 2.2 times higher in political editor roles and 1.2 times higher in health editors roles.

### **Chapter 3: Gender and racial diversity of top editors in politics**

- In South African news outlets, almost half of political editors are women. However, in



Kenyan outlets and in Indian regional news, the political editors are exclusively men. Women constitute 1 in 6 political editors in Nigeria (16%), 1 in 5 in the UK (20%), 1 in 3 in the US (31%), and 1 in 3 in Indian national dailies (34%).

- None of the top editorial roles in politics in the UK is held by a person of color. In the US, people of color hold 17% of these roles, which represents approximately a third of their proportion in the working population, as well as being lower than their proportion in the news workforce (22%). In South Africa, 60% of the political editors are people of color vs. 93% of the working population.

#### **Chapter 4: Gender and racial diversity of top editors in health**

- In five of our six countries, the majority of editors in health beats in national news media, typically seen as a lower-profile beat, are women. This is in line with the gender stereotyping of news desk assignments which has historically placed health among lower profile, “softer” news topics. In Nigeria, women are marginally underrepresented as health editors (45%), while in Indian regional news they are severely marginalized (8%). This is in stark contrast with Indian nationals where 78% of the health editors are women, followed by 71% in the US (national), 67% in Kenya, 59% in the UK (national & nations), and 51% in South Africa.

#### **Chapter 5: Gender and racial diversity of top editors in economics/business beats**

- A majority of economics/business editors in the US (60%) and half in South Africa are women, which makes them positive outliers compared to the other researched countries.
- The lowest proportion of women economics/business editors was found in Indian regional (4%) and national (23%) news outlets. Women constitute less than a third of economics/business editors in Kenya (31%) and the UK (30%), and approximately a quarter in Nigeria.

- Once again, people of color are significantly underrepresented in the top economics/business editor jobs. If the representation of people of color in these positions matched their proportion in the working population in the US, South Africa, and the UK, the number of people of color in these roles would be 3 times, 2.2 times and 1.2 times higher.

#### **Chapter 6: Gender and racial diversity of top editors in foreign affairs desks**

- Around 1 in 3 foreign editors in the US national media (31%) and in the UK national & nations (34%) are women (Note: research was not conducted in the remaining four countries for this beat). Women are underrepresented in the most senior foreign affairs editorial roles both in the UK and the US. People of color are severely marginalized in foreign affairs roles in the UK and US. If their representation matched their proportion in the working population, the number of people of color in these roles would be respectively 4 and 3.5 times higher.

#### **Chapter 7: Beyond representation: the barriers that prevent women — including women of color — from being fully included in decision-making in news**

- Over 80% of the interviewed news editors (21 of the 25 who were asked the question) believe that newsrooms and news cultures are still dominated by men.
- Lower representation and persistent gender stereotyping in news desk assignments are perceived as the two biggest barriers to women’s inclusion in news leadership. Other barriers include bearing the brunt of the work-life imbalance in journalism, being on the outside of an all-boys club that aids career progression in journalism, harassment while on the job, and women being seen as ineffective in making their own case for change.

## The challenges that women of color face in news leadership and newsrooms

- Systematic sidelining and race-based exclusion are the most frequently mentioned taxing experiences that women of color news leaders share. Coupled with high levels of burnout due to being everyone's support pillar, this leads to higher-than-average attrition among women of color. *"I don't have the energy anymore to just keep going, it feels like bashing my head against the brick wall."* They often experience their career stalling due to lack of support and growth opportunities.
- *"Inclusion is a real blind spot."* The interviewed women of color news leaders feel disproportionately burnt out, isolated, and/or dismissed. They operate in a triply stressful environment: dealing with a situation that is personally taxing, where they are expected to resolve their own underrepresentation, at the risk of damaging their already slow-progressing careers.
- Top leadership's buy-in to the problem of the lack of racial diversity/cultural inclusion is often reactive rather than truly driven by an appetite for change. Fear of falling short often prevents white leaders from fully engaging with the issue of racial injustice in newsrooms and news leadership. They recoil amid the inevitable pain. Two

years on from George Floyd's death, there has been some backlash among leaders against news organizations' soul-searching and interventions aimed at improving representation or inclusion of people of color in news.

- Impossible expectations are placed on ethnic minorities who have less power to resolve the problem of their own underrepresentation and/or cultural exclusion from news leadership. Interventions aimed at improving the representation or inclusion of racially diverse staff are rarely measured, which limits their success.

## Chapter 8: Why diversity does not guarantee inclusion: the role of culture

- Five key gender and racial biases stand in the way of women/women of color's inclusion and representation in news leadership: prove-it-again, tightrope, tug-of-war, racial stereotyping, and maternal wall biases.
- Bias can be interrupted by small, systematic, incremental, measurable changes to work processes and with individual training. It is critical to tackle systemic and organizational bias, not just individual bias (for more ideas see Summary of solutions themes).

## Chapter 9: Solutions for how to close the diversity and inclusion gap in news leadership in high-profile beats

- Changing the newsroom culture to be more inclusive; implementing gender equality policies; and measuring progress are perceived to be among the more successful tools in driving higher representation and inclusion in news organizations (see Summary of solutions themes).
- The key drivers for all women's inclusion in news leadership are: retaining talent, being intentional about



change and introducing targets, improving women's representation in top-tier management, allyship, and buy-in from both senior leadership and grassroots.

- The important role of social norms, the need to tackle systemic bias, and the potential positive impact of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging experts are blind spots for news leaders.
- The important practical solutions outlined in this chapter have been presented in the Summary of solutions themes section.

### **Trailblazers in the global south and north are advancing women's representation and inclusion in news leadership**

- Among the innovative organizations that stand out for their efforts on representation and inclusion are The New York Times, Mint in India, Bloomberg, and African Women in Media. The New York Times has shared the pillars of the inclusive culture that the organization is building (p. 102); Mint shared how they have managed to nurture an above-average number of women in their leadership team (p. 107); Bloomberg has offered a window on their holistic work and successes in improving gender representation in content (p. 111); while African Women in Media have reflected on their work in supporting women journalists in Africa and on consolidating efforts among associations for improved success (p. 116).

## **Part 2: How to include the missing perspectives of women in news coverage: representation, storytelling, and portrayal. The problems and the solutions**

### **Chapter 1: The existing but underexplored gender gaps in news coverage**

- The news fails to cover sufficiently/misses out altogether the gaps in power (p. 127), pay (p. 130), safety (p. 135), authority (p. 140), confidence (p. 145), health (p. 150), and

ageism (p. 156), whereby male-favoring biases in all societies and most organizations provide men with an unfair head start over women that frequently deepened during the pandemic. Under 0.02% of the global news coverage between 2017 and April 2022 featured any of these gender gap terms, with 94% of this coverage focusing on the pay gap. This report provides multiple angles for covering these gaps in the news which will only narrow if tackled at systemic, organizational, and individual levels.

- Various research findings converge around the worrying finding that news organizations are turning a blind eye when it comes to the safety of women journalists, a problem that demands urgent attention.

### **Chapter 2: The existing systemic, organizational, and individual biases in news coverage**

- Albeit from a low base, the proportion of women news experts has grown from 19% to 24% in the last five years globally. Interestingly, 4 in 10 gender initiatives in news have been dedicated to improving women's visibility as experts (see Part 3). Databases and lists may be making a difference.
- The glass ceiling for women's voices in news coverage has been hovering between 15% and 30% in recent decades. On top of the societal structural barriers that women face, the interviews conducted with news editors and experts revealed that there are five key news coverage biases at play which have held up progress: the status quo bias and male biases which collude to produce gender blindness in news coverage; the short-term outlook of journalists; reductive journalism; and organizations' unwillingness to report on themselves.
- Evidence suggests that the gender-stereotypical assignment of editorial roles in beats may be suppressing women's consumption of high-profile news genres which tend to be edited by men.



### The problem with news storytelling: what stories are being missed?

- Lack of awareness of gender angles and the low perceived importance of gender stories are at the heart of the missing gender equity/equality storytelling in news.
- The micro (human) stories within big political, economic, or health stories are often missed out.
- The perspectives of people of color are missing from political news; higher weighting is given to news relevant to white people, evidenced in the “missing white woman syndrome”.

### Women’s portrayal in the news is a blind spot for the news industry globally

- In the last two decades, the news industry has failed to shift the stereotypes which hold women captive in society, largely due to news organizations not tracking women’s portrayal in coverage in the same way as some track their representation. Consequently, news organizations are more likely to reinforce gender (and racial) stereotypes than to challenge them, even when women have reached representational parity in the news (see the curious case of Bulgarian news p. 173).

### Chapter 3: Solutions on how to improve women’s representation and portrayal in news coverage and their centrality in storytelling. Drivers of positive change and recommended interventions

- The key perceived drivers for improving women’s representation and portrayal in news coverage at organizational level involve tackling the problem in a systematic way by setting and tracking targets. At an individual level, news editors see raising awareness of the issue as a key driver to the solutions and at an industry level it is sharing best practice. The important practical solutions identified in this report have been shared in the Summary of solutions themes section.

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

- Four status quo-disruptive organizations are featured in this report: Khabar Lahariya – the first all-women newsroom in India (p. 190), featured in the Oscar-nominated documentary *Writing with Fire*; the Nation Media Group which launched the first Gender Desk in Kenya and in Africa (p. 194); The Fuller Project, a non-profit global newsroom dedicated to producing impact-driven journalism reporting on issues that affect women (p. 198); and the Guardian, which recently launched *Her Stage* newsletter targeted at new audiences, particularly women (p. 202). The success of these organizations in producing more gender-balanced and inclusive journalism is underpinned by collaboration, innovation, alignment from the top and at grass-roots level, and passion for elevating the voices of marginalized groups.

### Part 3: Progress – Existing initiatives aiming to reduce gender inequality in news

- For this project AKAS analyzed 168 gender-focused initiatives in news from 118 news, non-profit, international, and governmental organizations operating in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, or globally. The analysis uncovered that only 10% (16) target systemic change while 68% (115 initiatives) target change at an individual journalist/ leader level. Only an eighth of all initiatives (13%) focus on the much-needed inclusion of women/ethnic minorities in news and only 7% articulate a culture change element within them.
- To make progress there is a need for more news initiatives to target change at both the societal and news organizational levels, focusing on inclusive cultures that ensure equitable decision-making and increase a sense of belonging. More initiatives are needed that aim to understand women audiences as news consumers and revenue generators. In an industry notorious for its

competitiveness, there is a sector-wide need for collaborative initiatives and initiatives that focus on de-stereotyping women's portrayal in news.

#### **Part 4: Solutions for reframing the need for change and sizing the business opportunity that women represent for the news industry**

- According to the interviewed editorial leaders, the narrative most likely to persuade news leaders to strive for gender and racial equity in newsrooms, news leadership, and coverage, contains three key elements: the need for journalism organizations to fulfil their duty to give equitable voice to women/minority groups, and the need to be relevant to all audiences, which in turn will lead to news organizations increasing their revenues and improving their volatile business models. The journalistic duty argument speaks louder to news leaders from the global south, while the audience relevance argument speaks louder to news leaders from the global north. The business case for change speaks to most.

#### **Business case forecast: what would happen if women were as likely as men to consume news?**

- If women consumed newspapers online and in print on a par with men (closing the

addressable gender consumption gap of 11-12%) as a result of news organizations taking actions along the news value chain, the full parity scenario in the business case points to cumulative business revenues of \$43 billion over the next five years and \$83 billion over the next 10 years. However, achieving gender parity in news consumption is likely to be a more gradual endeavor. So if news organizations were to close the gender consumption gap by one percentage point each year over the next decade, the additional cumulative revenues would be \$11bn by 2027 and \$38 billion by 2032.

- Amedia – the largest publisher of local news in Norway – has offered their unique analysis (the only one among the 168 initiatives) of the relationship between news production, women's share of voice and female audiences (p. 241). Their analysis reveals a positive relationship between the share of female authors and the share of female protagonists; the share of female protagonists and the share of female readership; and the share of female readership and the share of female subscribers.



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**SimilarWeb** for providing free access to its tool that enables searches for the visit levels and gender breakdown of any url. This supported calculation of the online gender consumption gap.

# Introduction: author's reflections

If you are part of the news media, rest assured that this report does not aim to get you on the back foot. Rather it is intended to help you put one foot in front of the other by providing stepping-stones towards progress. It contains tested innovative ideas, case studies of trailblazers in news, and evidence of the positive effects of increasing women's representation and inclusion in news leadership – additional revenue, more engaged audiences, a happier workforce, and greater impact in a tumultuous world in sore need of high-quality journalism. It distils the wisdom of news leaders and sources into 12 implementable solutions themes.

As I was interviewing dozens of news leaders from around the world, absorbing their views on why women/women of color frequently do not feel included in decision-making even when they form part of news leadership teams, or why women's representation in news coverage has flatlined in the last two decades and, importantly, what to do about these challenges, my heart gradually swelled with compassion. **I realized much more viscerally something I had previously known intellectually - how incredibly taxing it is to be a journalist today.** Over the last couple of decades, journalists have faced a plethora of challenges: transitioning from analogue/print to digital formats while competition proliferated; being “*bashed on the head*” (to borrow a phrase from an interviewed news leader) about their “*upended business model*”; fighting misinformation daily while striving to

report the truth; enduring threats, harassment, and abuse on- and offline at scale, even to the point of death; and, more recently, being warned of their irrelevance to audiences due to leadership/newsroom homogeneity and the gender and racial discrimination latent in newsrooms. The strategic challenges for news leaders have been enormous, and lived out under grinding time and psychological pressures born out of relentless news cycles dominated in recent years by seismic stories — a global pandemic, a war threatening nuclear spill-over, an energy price shock, global economic uncertainty, and a looming climate crisis. I am sure we can all agree that this is a lot for any individual, organization, or industry to take on. Add to this the fear of being accused of gender or racial bias and we are looking at change at a snail's pace.

A sequel report to *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* and *in COVID-19 News*, this report maintains the tradition of evidence-led and, wherever possible, triangulated insights and shared solutions. But in assessing the problem/solutions to women's underrepresentation and cultural exclusion in news leadership, and underrepresentation and skewed portrayal in news coverage, we at **AKAS now felt it imperative to broaden our lens of enquiry by overlaying race onto gender where countries had multi-racial populations (South Africa, the UK, and the US).** The quantitative and qualitative methods we used to draw conclusions included a content analysis of over 900 million online news stories; a market

analysis of 1,166 editorial roles across the six countries; analysis of 168 news initiatives worldwide aiming to improve gender equality in news; a literature review of over 200 sources exploring the business value of greater equity in organizations; a revenue forecast of the business opportunity that women audiences hold for news; and hundreds of surveys, indices, books, and articles. This time round, the methodology also included in-depth interviews with 41 editors-in-chief, senior editors or news experts. Without them, this report would contain a fraction of the multitude of perspectives and solutions it offers. In the context of the huge challenges that journalists face today, I feel deep gratitude for the time that each senior leader and news expert chose to spare for this project. The report is infused with numerous quotes from them – often raw and shared in full – offering a platform for the authentic voices of news makers around the globe. To protect the identities of interviewees who opened up about their struggles and at times even anguish, we have not identified the countries where the quoted voices came from. The methodology section details the positions held by interviewees, grouped into clusters.

### **The limitations of a white writer exploring the issues of women of color**

The data- and perspective-gathering and writing phases of this project were not without their challenges. One personal limitation I experienced originated from my position as a white professional woman, whose expertise is geared more towards gender than race, writing about the harrowing experiences of women of color. I reconciled this moral challenge encapsulated in the *white savior* syndrome by deciding to be merely a conduit for the quantitative and qualitative truths uncovered in the course of the project. In this I was supported by the multi-ethnic and multi-racial AKAS team. I remained cognizant of my inability to fully understand the experiences

of women of color. I also tapped into my own experiences in the UK of being “othered”, as a first-generation immigrant from Bulgaria who did not graduate from Oxbridge or an Ivy League university. The deeper I immersed myself in the intersecting problems of the racial and gender injustice that women of color face in news, the more evident the importance of being a white ally became (see Part 1, Chapter 7). Not focusing on other critical characteristics that lead to inequity in newsrooms, such as class/caste, affluence, education, sexuality, religion, location, and disability, emerged as another limitation of the report, resulting from the finite time and resources available.

### **“The media unfortunately doesn’t report on itself”: the double standards in journalism**

Perhaps the most surprising limitation that I stumbled upon was the discrepancy between the high standards of transparency and accountability that news organizations demand of the organizations and individuals they investigate in their reporting vs. the lower transparency and accountability standards that some apply to themselves. A significant minority of the news leaders I approached for the research underwent a rigorous approval process with their external communications departments before their perspectives appeared on the pages of this report. In one case I communicated exclusively through the communications team, who acted as the message gatekeepers. This noticeable double standard has been referenced by Meredith Clark, who led the News Leaders Association’s diversity survey in the US in recent years before resigning in 2022, disillusioned by the pitifully low participation rates of news organizations in the industry diversity survey.<sup>2</sup> It transpired that “*historic protests*” and an industry-wide debate about race and representation did not boost response rates. “*It feels like supreme hypocrisy on the part of the journalism industry.*”

2. Scire, 2022



*Transparency and doing the digging and the reporting — all of that is so germane to what we understand journalism to be. And we are absolutely unwilling to do it among ourselves”, Clarke concluded.*

In some countries this challenge manifested in difficulty in convincing news leaders – particularly men – to spare time to speak with me. This apprehensiveness about engaging perhaps points to a strong underlying fear within the news industry of being exposed, as well as to the low priority that these issues carry for some. One male news leader from the global south who did generously agree to be interviewed, hypothesized on why it was so difficult to recruit male interviewees from his country, surmising:

*“Maybe the worry here is that they don’t want to come out like they’re not doing enough about gender, or that they’re a stumbling block - or basically they just don’t want to be quoted. Maybe they feel that one day it may come back to haunt them.”*

The same editor highlighted news media’s reluctance to report on itself and the accountability issue that this creates.

*“Who is holding us accountable? Is it ourselves, is it our external audience, is it news organizations outside, is it news organizations from within? ... The problem with journalists is that they don’t report themselves. The media industry will also not report itself.”*

**Since 2020, global progress on gender equality in society has been under downward pressure. The share of women’s quoted voice in news and the gender gap in society in the six countries have moved in the same direction, pointing to the close relationship between society and news**

*The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* was published in 2020. One of the key findings which was amplified by numerous news media outlets at the time and is still quoted today<sup>3</sup> was the realization that news globally was largely a man’s affair: it was produced by more men, featured more men, and was consumed by more men. Moreover, the news industry in the countries of interest in our study had not achieved substantive progress in the previous decade, primarily due to the prevalent but unchallenged or unnoticed male-favoring social norms. We also found that news media overlaid additional male bias onto the existing social bias, especially in high-profile beats such as politics and economics. Another big study comparing gender equality in news in 123 countries across the globe, published the same year, concluded that gender equality in news media was lagging behind gender equality achieved globally.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, AKAS analysis of GDELT revealed that global news coverage on gender equality issues declined from 0.56% before the pandemic outbreak to 0.44% since.

The AKAS team and I asked ourselves what had changed globally and in our six countries at a societal level since 2020. We found that **over the last two years, gender equality in coverage has experienced downward pressure globally and in three of our countries of interest.** Additionally, in 2022 men are almost twice as likely as women to occupy leadership roles in media and communications (63% vs. 37%).<sup>5</sup> According to the latest World Economic Forum

3. Jamiu, 2022

4. Comparing Gender and Media Equality Across the Globe in Djerf-Pierre & Edstrom, 2020

5. LinkedIn Economic Graph in World Economic Forum Gender Index 2022 report in Djerf-Pierre & Edstrom, 2020

6. The Gender Gap Index is comprised of 4 sub-indices: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment

Gender Gap Index<sup>6</sup>, the gender inequality gap between men and women globally widened marginally between 2021 and 2022 across the 145 measured countries. Nevertheless, three of our countries of focus have narrowed their Gender Gap Index in the last two years i.e. they have improved in terms of gender equality. Since 2020, Kenya has jumped significantly from 109th to 57th in the rankings, the US has climbed from 53rd to 27th, while Nigeria has crept up from 128th to 123rd. India, South Africa, and the UK have, however, dropped down these rankings. The fall has been steepest in India, which now ranks 135th (vs. 112th in 2020), followed by South Africa (slipping from 17th to 20th), and the UK (falling marginally from 21st to 22nd place). In terms of women's share of voice in online news, the AKAS proxy analysis presented later (see Figure 1, page 35) suggests that since 2019, the ratio between men's and women's share of voice may have improved slightly in the US, Kenya, and South Africa, remained stable in Nigeria, but worsened slightly in the UK and India, mirroring the changes in the Gender Gap Index.

A number of **events of representational and symbolic significance for women** have taken place in the last two years, among them the election of the US' first female Black and Asian Vice President, the death of the trailblazing US Supreme Court associate justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the appointments of the first Black woman to the position of Director-General of the World Trade Organization, the first indigenous person to a cabinet position in the US, the third female Prime Minister in the UK (albeit for a brief moment), the first Black woman to the US Supreme Court, and women leaders in Northern Ireland and Scotland winning elections in their nations. Additionally, more women vied for political roles in the latest election in Kenya, and marginally more got elected than in 2017. The Tokyo Olympics became the most gender-equal games in history. An all-women Air India

pilot crew flew across the world for the first time. A documentary about the only and successful all-women's newswire in India - Khabar Lahariya - was nominated for an Oscar (see Part 2). The UN Assembly adopted a resolution condemning all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. A number of legislative changes took place across the board, including South Africa's President Ramaphosa introducing three bills to parliament designed to bring justice to the victims of gender-based violence, Scotland eliminating the tampon tax, the US administration establishing a Gender Policy Council, and India bringing a landmark agreement to protect garment workers from violence, following the 2021 murder of Dalit woman Gyasri Kathiravel.

Other **events shone a light on the deep-seated racial and gender injustice within different global contexts**: the murder of George Floyd in the US, which reignited a global anti-racist Black Lives Matter movement; a woman being tied to a tree and thrashed by her husband for seven hours in India; eight women being gang-raped in West Village, Krugersdorp in South Africa; British cricket player Azeem Rafiq revealing that systematic racist experiences had brought him to the brink of suicide; a racist campaign against footballers of color being



exposed in the UK; the Nigerian Parliament rejecting five gender equality bills in March this year; the US Supreme Court overturning women's constitutional right to abortion in the US and, most recently, in her brief tenure as UK Prime Minister, Liz Truss dropping the previously existing ministerial role dedicated to women, and her male successor Rishi Sunak marginalizing women in the cabinet more than any other recent Prime Minister, establishing a downward trend for women cabinet ministers from a peak of 36% in 2006-07 to the current 23%.

**Politics, business, and foreign affairs beats are missing women editors. Women of color are often completely locked out of the editorial decision-making**

To understand the extent of the representational, inclusion, and portrayal issues in news leadership and news coverage, we explored the gender and racial balance in news through the lenses of organizational resources (i.e. representation and inclusion), newsgathering (representation of contributors and protagonists) and news outputs (what stories are told and how women are portrayed). We focused on quantifying women's and women of color's representation in top editorial jobs and in editorial roles in the highest-profile beats: i.e. politics, business/economics, foreign affairs, and (since the pandemic) health. The interviews were instrumental in understanding how included women felt in decision-making. We defined *inclusion* as leaders' perception of how included women/women of color felt in decision-making compared to their peers. We did not extend this definition to *belonging* i.e. how safe or how much they felt they belonged within the organization<sup>7</sup>, although often interviewees naturally veered towards this dimension too.

The report yielded dispiriting findings around women's persistent marginalization at the top of the organizations and in high-profile

beats. Among the most dispiriting were those exposing the extent to which women of color are locked out of decision-making. **Women constitute 1 in 4 editors-in-chief across the six countries, marginally lower than the global average more than a decade ago** (see Part 1, Chapter 1). Progress has diverged across the six countries, the proportion of women editors-in-chief being highest in South Africa and the UK and lowest in India. 1 in 6 political editors in Nigeria is a woman, 1 in 5 in the UK, 1 in 3 in the US and in Indian national dailies, although there were no women political editors found in the 23 Indian regional publications analyzed or in Kenya (see Part 1, Chapter 3). We also found that news produced by a male-dominated group of editors is of limited relevance to other groups. Worryingly, women are turning off politics and political news. Women editors across the board are best represented in health beats and in business/economics beats in the US and South Africa, where there is gender parity or women exceed men. The lowest proportion of women economics/business editors was found in Nigeria and in Indian national and regional news media (see Part 1, Chapter 5).

Women of color are completely locked out of editorial roles in the highest-profile news in the UK, shockingly holding no editorships in politics, health, and foreign affairs beats (see Part 1, Chapters 3, 4, and 6). This demographic is also severely marginalized in the US and marginalized in South Africa.

Women who do sit at the decision-making table frequently find their voices faint, dismissed, or drowned out. The gendered approach to assigning beats in newsrooms remains in place and is among the biggest obstacles to women's inclusion in decision-making at the most senior level. The power and authority gaps that exist between men and women, in favor of men, feed into the inclusion barrier, particularly acutely for women of color. This asymmetry in society that deems certain traits (e.g. being assertive or self-promoting) positive in men but negative in women,

7. Jacob et al., 2020



makes women's inclusion in news leadership that much more challenging, a point made persuasively by prominent UK journalist Mary Ann Sieghart, whom I interviewed for this project, in her comprehensive study, *The Authority Gap*.

**The taxing experiences of women of color in news is not on anyone's strategic or operational radar. It is critical to explore inclusion intersectionally**

Approaching this work with compassion, I found the interviews with women news leaders affected by racial injustice the hardest to process. Many had endured high levels of pain, sometimes for more than a decade. Certain quotes lodged in my memory.

“It has been a very lonely process, in a way that the gender work wasn't, because there were lots of women around, and you could sort of feel that you were doing it as a group, you didn't feel so exposed”; “There's so much inherent, implicit and explicit bias against people of color in this business, it never ends.”; “People don't have that resilience to keep fighting discrimination within news and media and even I've run out of steam.”

These words from women I interviewed reverberate in my mind. **The challenges these women of color face are more excruciating because the racial discrimination comes on top of a battery of gender-related challenges.** These women are being disproportionately sidelined, their career growth frequently hitting a barrier. They often face the impossibly onerous expectation that they should resolve

the problem of their own underrepresentation and exclusion from newsrooms and leadership. Meanwhile fearful leadership teams are often unwilling to truly engage with the problem. Their responses are commonly knee-jerk reactions in the form of untracked and under-resourced interventions, as happened following the murder of George Floyd. Two years on, these so-called *bake sale syndrome*<sup>8</sup> activities have typically lost momentum or, worse, been quietly phased out due to leadership backlash (see Part 1, Chapter 7).

In the last two years, my own thinking has evolved in different areas, including in the importance of applying a racial/ethnic lens to gender diversity and inclusion. I did not appreciate quite how important it is to measure intersectionality in news, until I discovered how absent from strategic discourse the dire situation of women journalists of color is in South Africa, the UK, and the US (see Parts 1, 2 and 5). I have already written two reports about the missing perspectives of women in news and yet, at no point did I realize the vastness of the discrepancy between the best and the worst represented sub-groups of women in news. Nor is the news industry any better. **Out of 45 news organizations AKAS analyzed across the UK, the US, and South Africa, only one (in the US) had reported on gender and ethnicity representation intersectionally in their diversity report.**

In her book *So You Want to Talk about Race*<sup>9</sup>, Ijeoma Oluo alerts us masterfully to the seemingly obvious but frequently neglected truth that women are not a homogenous group. When seeking to improve the representation of women in society or in news, we often default to advancing the condition of the dominant sub-groups, such as (white) educated middle-class women, rather than those from the most underprivileged backgrounds (for example Black-African mothers in the UK/US or Dalit women in rural India).

8. A sudden and inconsequential flurry of activity born out of a senior leader's spur of the moment reaction, identified in *Belonging*, Jacob et al., 2020

9. Oluo, 2019

## Underexplored gender gaps and important stories are missed in news coverage

Besides the societal and organizational barriers that impede the improvement of women's representation and portrayal in news coverage (see Part 2, Chapter 2), **five other key barriers affect the news industry**. The combination of the status quo bias<sup>10</sup> and gender blindness<sup>11</sup> in journalism results in missed stories or women being under-featured in news coverage. Another three barriers are also in play: the short-term outlook forced by the relentless news cycle, reductive journalism which tends to look to simplify angles as a way of delivering news stories amid a grueling filing schedule, and news organizations' unwillingness to report on themselves.

Micro stories within the big political, economic, and health stories – focusing on human angles – are often missed out of news coverage. Evidence reveals that news relevant to white people in the global north is given undue weight in coverage while the perspectives of people of color are often missed out in political news (see Part 2, Chapter 2). News leaders diverge on the best way to increase news coverage containing gender angles, some favoring a dedicated beat for women's issues, others preferring to incorporate news angles focusing on women across beats. Given the current woefully small coverage of women's and gender angles, we have concluded that there is plenty of room for both horizontal and vertical approaches. All **seven** of the **underexplored gender gaps in news coverage** which AKAS uncovered during research – gaps in power, pay, safety, authority, confidence, health, and ageism, as explored in Part 2, Chapter 1 – would benefit from both vertical and horizontal treatment. The case studies featured in Part 2 also highlight the success of both editorial approaches.

## Women's portrayal: the blind spot in news coverage

Women's portrayal in news has been stereotypical and riddled with prejudice for years. Since it is not being measured by news providers systematically, if at all, the path to change is obscure. While some progress has been made globally in terms of women's representation as experts in the news (potentially linked to the development of initiatives and databases of women contributors), the portrayal of women protagonists has been stuck or even regressed in the last two decades, with women mainly portrayed in the stereotypical roles of caregivers, men's sidekicks, victims, and sexual objects (see Part 2, Chapter 3).

## Learning to appreciate small positive change is important. Aim to change behaviors, not eradicate biases

Perhaps surprisingly, if I were to write a specific recommendation aimed at setting representation targets for women in news leadership today, as we did in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*, **I would not recommend a blanket gender parity target across all countries in the global north and south**. Through the dozens of interviews I conducted, I came to appreciate the importance of the cultural and structural baseline in each country and the danger of overlaying Western cultural expectations onto non-Western societies. For example, the AKAS team discovered that many news providers in the global south did not operate within editorial news beats, which prompted the question of whether the very premise of a beat was a Western construct.

Whilst apt from a human rights perspective, a target to achieve gender parity might be perceived in some cultures as so steep as to be off-putting altogether, triggering what

10. Unconscious attachment to the way things are at the expense of making them better

11. Failure to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of women/girls and men/boys are ascribed according to their gender rather than through merit

behavioral scientists term an *ostrich effect*.<sup>12</sup> Somewhat linked to this learning is another shift in my thinking: learning to appreciate incremental progress (see Part 1, Chapter 8). The shift in social and cultural behavioral or attitudinal norms that resides at the heart of progress towards gender/racial equity in news is difficult to achieve because often our behaviors are impacted by biases which remain unconscious. Joan C. Williams, a leading expert in addressing structural inequalities in organizations, argues that small steps can lead to big changes, as long as they are measured and applied systematically. The nine case studies presented in this report, featuring news organizations who are changing the face of equitable journalism, are a testament to that insight. My thinking around gender and racial sensitivity training also became more nuanced in the last year. While raising awareness and self-awareness of existing biases within news leadership and newsrooms remains vitally important, research into successful interventions suggests that the most effective approach entails a focus on changing behaviors rather than eradicating biases. I was surprised by how sensitive some news editors became at the very mention of the word bias. One quote stuck in my mind.

“*I don't think it's a good idea for organizations to try and unpack the biases of individuals, I think that can be incredibly divisive... Because it's assuming that a person is biased, and [then] the corner is up.*”

Many behavioral science experts argue that while changing behaviors is possible and works, eradicating biases is not. Thus, their advice is that training should conclude with commitments from everyone of what they will do differently going forward.

## **Women and men should be inside the tent together. Equitable journalism can only be achieved if they join together into a functional whole**

Finally, a pivotal area where my thinking has evolved in the last two years is the importance of approaching the topic of gender and racial inequality in news with compassion rather than judgement (the position adopted by many advocacy organizations and parts of the news industry itself today). *“The world full of empowered women isn't one where men are marginalized. It's a world where everyone thrives”* says Indian author and gender expert, Purnima Mane. While it is naturally and rightly easier to feel compassion for women and women of color who are severely underrepresented along the whole news value chain, it is harder to feel compassion for men or white men who are in the driving seat in news organizations.

However, it is important to do so if sustainable and meaningful change is to happen.

**Compassion does not mean condoning the industry's underrepresentation, exclusion, or reinforcement of prejudice when portraying women in news, but understanding the systemic root causes behind inequity; and how that inequity affects men adversely too.** This in turn will enhance the potential for engaging men decision-makers who can accelerate positive change. After all, Kathrine Switzer, the US's first female marathon runner, was only able to break the rules and complete the marathon because a group of supportive men surrounded her until the finish line, preventing her disqualification.

A male editor-in-chief from the global south explained how excluding men in power can make attempts to improve gender equity end up being perceived as futile.

12. The ostrich effect is a cognitive bias manifested in the tendency to avoid dangerous or negative information by simply closing oneself off from this information.

“In [this country] the interesting thing is that most of these workshops are organized by female pressure groups, and the audience, most times, are largely female. And I think that’s counterproductive, because then you are not really addressing the decision-makers... you’re not bringing the men in, into a space where your critical voices can tell them the truth and push them towards changing the status quo.”

This perception about gender-exclusive echo chambers from the global south has been echoed in recent research from the US which points to notably higher interest and engagement in diversity and inclusion initiatives among ethnic minority groups, who have less power to change the status quo: Black (59%), Asian (52%) and Hispanic (57%) journalists proved more likely than their white colleagues (44%) to discuss issues of diversity.<sup>13</sup>

### Highly competitive news culture crowds out the compassion that underpins collaboration. Collaboration lies at the heart of trailblazing news initiatives

Competition (which forces focus on oneself) is antipathetic to compassion (which requires focus on others). Unfortunately, the interviews I conducted and ample other sources attest to high levels of competition still being woven into the core of newsroom cultures across the global north and south. Many news editors alluded to the highly competitive culture still prevalent in journalism. One called it “a leftover from the 80s and 90s cut-throat-get-on-with-it

culture” which is more challenging for women journalists because they “can definitely be more questioning of themselves, maybe, less bullish about their opinions”. Another senior leader called it a “one dimensional win-or-lose culture” that hurts the wellbeing and mental health of all journalists irrespective of gender. In a recent tweet, the British news broadcaster Jon Sopel even likened the news culture of his early career to *The Hunger Games*.<sup>14</sup> **By contrast, the nine case studies presented in this report (see Parts 1, 2 and 4), and the interviews with senior editors reveal an implicit realization that increased collaboration between journalists and leaders from diverse backgrounds, cultures, countries, and organizations leads to more inclusive storytelling and higher audience engagement among more diverse audiences.** The case studies feature Bloomberg’s success in achieving holistic impact on different levels, the Guardian’s work in coalescing new and established voices, Khabar Lahariya’s egalitarian, collaborative and compassionate journalism, The New York Times’ strategic program to redefine culture, Mint’s journey to a much higher than average representation of women in news leadership in business news, African Women in Media’s quest to consolidate efforts among associations to enhance progress, Nation Media Group’s pioneering gender desk work in partnership with The Fuller Project (TFP) and TFP’s impact-driven journalism.

Unfortunately, trailblazers aside, what we also uncovered through the interviews and analysis of 168 existing initiatives to improve gender equality in news is that there is a deficit of collaboration in journalism at an industry, organizational or individual level (see Part 3). This lack of collaboration results from the highly competitive ethos in journalism which impedes the industry’s and organizations’ capacity to tackle equity and inclusion issues at a structural level.

13. Pew Research Center, 2022

14. Tweet from 11th September 2022



**The dormant revenue waiting to be captured: closing the addressable gender consumption gap by one percentage point every year over the next decade would generate additional cumulative revenues of \$11 billion by 2027 and \$38 billion by 2032**

“One of the things that I have found really important is not to make this [diversity and equity] just an emotional argument about having a responsibility to change society. When you start talking about business and survival - what this means for our coverage, what this means for our business - that's what appeals to senior news leaders,”

reflected a female news leader from the global north. The most frequently used argument for gender parity in news in the last few decades has been that it is women's human right to feature in news proportionately to their representation in the population. And yes, this argument is unequivocally fair. But it has not sufficiently shifted the views of the decision-makers who hold the key to gender balance in news. **Most news leaders cited this problem and the opportunity to shift the narrative towards the business benefits of being more gender (and ethnically) balanced.** In response, Richard Addy and the AKAS team conducted a ground-breaking business case investigation into the value that gender parity in news consumption (currently tilted towards men) would generate (see Part 4, Chapter 2).

He found that over the next decade, under a conservative scenario whereby the addressable gender consumption gap of between 11-12 percentage points was closed by one percentage point a year, **the global newspaper industry could generate additional cumulative revenues of \$11 billion by 2027 and \$38 billion by 2032.** To achieve this however, it is important that more women are plugged in along the whole news value chain (from editing and reporting to featuring in news outputs). The business case investigation includes strategic, editorial, platform- and measurement-based actions that organizations must take to achieve revenue growth. In addition, the analysis of fresh data, generously offered to AKAS by Amedia<sup>15</sup> in Norway and presented in Part 4, revealed a positive relationship between the share of female authors and the share of female protagonists; the share of female protagonists and the share of female readership; and the share of female readership and the share of female subscribers.

We live in defining, turbulent times. They demand idealism and preclude cynicism. We owe it to the next generations that they know what truth is, told by a thriving journalism industry that cares to reflect their different perspectives. “Drop by drop the river rises”: an African proverb reminds us that it is often the small steps that lead to a sustained change. Reflecting on this profoundly optimistic aphorism made me wonder what the world of news would look like if each organization and journalist decided to make a one percent change in their behavior to make news more equitable. How inclusive would journalism look then?

I hope that the evidence, narrative, and recommendations presented in this report help you to find that one percent change that you would like to make or instigate...

15. The largest publisher of local newspapers in Norway

# What has happened to women's share of voice since *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*?

Although the purpose of this publication is not to track the representation of women as news experts, sources, or protagonists since 2019, which would be very costly, the AKAS team produced a proxy analysis for the share of voice of men vs. women in global news by comparing the ratio of feminine vs. masculine pronouns used in online news articles between January 2017 and April 2022.<sup>16</sup> Where the ratio is close to one, this is seen as an indicator of women's share of voice approaching parity with men's. It should be emphasized that this methodology is different to the one used by Media Ecosystems Analysis Group in the previous *Missing Perspectives* reports and the two should therefore not be compared or contrasted.

**For every feminine pronoun used in news globally, more than three masculine ones outnumber it. Not much has changed since 2019**

Figure 1 shows that in the last five and a half years, the ratio between the feminine and masculine share of pronouns used in news has not changed significantly in the UK, US, or South Africa (although it has improved slightly in the US and South Africa since 2019 and worsened slightly in the UK). In these three countries, however, where masculine pronouns have been mentioned approximately twice as frequently as feminine, the ratio between men's and women's share of pronouns has been significantly better than globally, where it has sat at between 3.8:1 and 3.2:1 during the period 2017 to 2022. Since 2018 Kenya's share

16. The analysis was carried out using the GDELT Project's global online news archive, which covers over 900 million stories. GDELT can convert search terms into 65 languages and was searched to determine the number of articles in each of the six countries and globally that contained terms using masculine pronouns (he said, he says, he sets out, he set out, he argued, he argues, he stated, he states, he explained, he explains) and feminine pronouns (she said, she says, she sets out, she set out, she argued, she argues, she stated, she states, she explained, she explains).

**Figure 1: Masculine vs. feminine pronoun analysis: Ratio between men's and women's share of voice in news (2017-2022)**

Region	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (to 09 May 22)	Assessment (2019 vs. 2022)
US	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.7	Slightly better
UK	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0	Slightly worse
South Africa	1.9	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.0	Slightly better
Kenya	3.8	3.3	3.2	3.0	2.7	2.8	Slightly better
Nigeria	5.0	5.5	5.0	5.0	4.8	5.0	Stable
India	5.7	6.2	5.7	5.7	5.9	6.3	Slightly Worse
Global	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.2	3.3	Slightly Better

Source: AKAS analysis of GDELT database (2022)

of feminine pronouns used in news articles has been higher than the global ratio. This year in Kenya for every feminine pronoun used in news there have been 2.8 masculine ones vs. 3.3 globally.

India and Nigeria are lagging significantly behind the global average and the other four countries. In India for every feminine pronoun mentioned in articles there are 6.3 masculine ones, while in Nigeria there are five. Furthermore, the ratio between masculine and feminine pronouns used in news articles

in India has increased i.e., become worse since 2019 and has remained static in Nigeria.

The overall picture of slow progress or stagnation in the last five years gives little grounds for optimism and serves as a strong motivator to introduce new initiatives which disrupt the male bias in the share of voice in online news at systemic, organizational, and individual levels. If there was a requirement to validate the need for this sequel publication, then this analysis is it.