



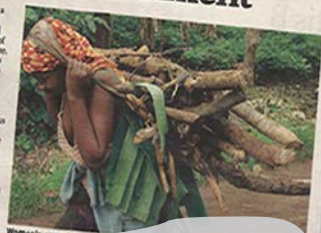
Gender Transformation & Empowerment

We also handle big cases - Mulyagonja

The Inspector General of Government, Irene Mulyagonja, Women urged to change mindset ahead of 2016



Women leadership could save the environment



Women's experience in food and fuel gathering makes them an invaluable source of knowledge on environmental management

WOMEN ACTIVITISTS ARE DEMANDING POLITICAL PARTIES PRIORITIZE WOMEN'S CONCERN AND NEEDS THAT HAVE BEEN SET IN THE WOMEN MANIFESTO 2016/2021.

By Ambrose Gahene

Women activists, under their umbrella organisation, Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) have called for mind set change, if gender equality is to be realised countrywide. The call was made in a one-day meeting at Hotel Africana, on Monday. The meeting brought together representatives of women activists, from all regions of Uganda. "Before you think of belonging to a particular political party, religion, social status or tribe, first put yourself in the shoes of being a woman and spearhead all women rights in Uganda," said the vocal and outspoken President of Uganda Football Alliance, (UFA) Rita Kibuka.



A HANDBOOK FOR THE
MEDIA, GENDER AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION
IN THE 2016 GENERAL ELECTIONS

WOMEN'S DEMOCRACY NETWORK
Uganda Chapter
Empowering Women's Voice

CEWIGO
MAKING POLICIES
WORK FOR WOMEN



Acfode
Breaking Through, Building Up and Binding

**A HANDBOOK FOR THE
MEDIA, GENDER AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION
IN THE 2016 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

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Introduction

Over the years female politicians in Uganda have become more successful in their struggle to occupy higher public offices and cabinet positions. Despite these advances, there are still major structural, societal and institutional barriers for women in their pursuit for political power. For female candidates, gendered media coverage remains a major factor in campaigns and elections. Historically the media has notoriously treated women differently and yet it is one of the most influential sources of information for the public. Much as there has been a major shift in the way society views a woman's role in the public sphere, the media continues to treat female politicians and candidates in traditional gender role frames and often times, the blatantly sexist and gendered coverage continues to affect the outcome of the campaign and the subsequent elections.

In most cases female politicians are covered in gendered terms, focusing on their marital status or appearance and emphasizing stereotypically "female" political issues like education and healthcare as feminine issue. Given such stereotypes the media not only undermines women's credibility and focus on other important issues, such as the economy, foreign policy and military affairs but also confines them to a specific gender roles or type of coverage that is not necessarily appropriate or accurate. As women seek to serve in elective offices, they are subjected to more negative and increasingly gendered coverage. The higher they get in government, the more they are subjected to gender stereotypes in the news media due to the gendered way that executive level offices are typically perceived by our society. The office of President, for example, "is the most manly of all areas" of politics, hence making femininity a big disadvantage to women candidates aspiring to occupy it.

Women's Leadership

Women's leadership or Feminist Leadership is: "recognizing that women bring different qualities to leadership, with a greater attention to collaboration, cooperation, collective decision-making, and above all, relationship-building". However society largely treats women leaders and more so politicians differently from the men. In most cases women politicians are always judged more harshly than the men and they must work a lot harder to disapprove society's biases against their leadership. It is also common for society to highlight the failures of women politicians since they tend to be fewer in the public domain. Such negative perceptions attract media publicity hence disadvantaging the emergence of more women in positions of power. Like all other people marginalised by society, women politicians have got to prove their capability and live above society's biases in order to excel in the political field.

Legal Instruments on Gender Equality, the Media and Elections

Legal Instrument	United Nations (UN) Charter
Article	Chapter 7
Provision	An election is not in compliance with International obligations and standards unless it includes the opportunity for full and equal participation of women as well as men.
Legal Instrument	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
Article	Article 7
Provision	States to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country, to ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to vote in all elections, and to be eligible for election, to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy, and to hold public office and perform public functions at all levels.
Legal Instrument	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
Article	Article 25

Provision	Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without unreasonable restrictions: to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; and to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his or her country.
Legal Instrument	The Beijing Platform for Action, 1995
Article	The role of the media to women
Provision	The Platform criticises the continued stereotyping of women by the media and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media and the need to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication. The Platform also calls for the promotion of a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.
Legal Instrument	The Africa Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHR)
Article	Article 13(1)
Provision	Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his/her country either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law.
Legal Instrument	Constitution of the Republic of Uganda
Article	Article 33
Provision	Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men. Women shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities
Legal Instrument	Constitution of the Republic of Uganda
Article	Article 29

Provision	Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression, movement, assembly and association; this shall include freedom to seek and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
Legal Instrument	The Presidential Election Act
Article	Article 2
Provision	A person is not qualified for election as President unless that person is a citizen of Uganda by birth; not less than thirty-five years and not more than seventy-five years of age and a person qualified to be a member of Parliament.
Legal Instrument	The Parliamentary Election Act
Article	Article 4
Provision	A person qualified to be a member of Parliament is a citizen of Uganda; is a registered voter; and has completed a minimum formal education of Advanced Level standard or its equivalent. A person is not qualified for election as a member of Parliament if that person is of unsound mind; is holding or acting in an office the functions of which involve a responsibility for or in connection with the conduct of an election; is a traditional or cultural leader as defined in article 246(6) of the Constitution; has been adjudged or otherwise declared bankrupt under any law in force in Uganda and has not been discharged; or is under a sentence of death or a sentence of imprisonment exceeding nine months imposed by any competent court without the option of a fine.
Legal Instrument	Electoral Commission
Article	Regulations
Provision	There shall be free and fair elections, which entails the implementation of an election that is free of intimidation, harassment and arrests and thus allows for citizens engagement to better aggregate and articulate their interests so that policy decisions address these interests and priorities.
Legal Instrument	The National Women's Council Act
Article	Article 3

Provision	The role of the Council is to organise the women of Uganda in a unified body; and to engage the women in activities that are of benefit to them and the nation. Among its roles is to encourage the women to consolidate their role in National Development in the political, economic, social, cultural and educational fields
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Understanding, Patriarchy, Sex and Gender

Patriarchy: is a social system whereby there are established and unquestionable rules of how society views men and women. In this system, certain customs, values and practices have been established under the name of 'culture'. In most cases women promote and defend patriarchy and hence they are the custodians and gatekeepers of their own oppression. For example, most women have got no problem with the definition of "womanhood" being seen as simply being a mother or "motherhood" and someone's wife or "*wifehood*". In most cases a woman is accorded respect in society because she is someone's wife or mother. Women that are unmarried or have failed to have children are looked down upon by society. Under patriarchy the patriarchal family is upheld and women are treated as dependents of men. The husband or father is regarded as taking the leadership and managing the resources on behalf of the other members of the family who are seen or regarded as his dependents.

Sex: is the biological difference between female and male. This includes the physical features or characteristics that distinguish women from men. Women have breasts and extended hips, while men have beards and hair on their chests. Sex is universal, that is it does not depend on where a person is born or what era a person is born in. Male and female biology is the same over time and around the world.

- ⇒ Sex is also associated with biological functions as determined by nature. At puberty women develop bigger breasts, while the voices of men break. The male and female have distinctive reproductive organs.
- ⇒ Biologically women's breasts are developed to fulfill their reproductive roles. Sex roles refer to biological functions that are limited to one particular sex, for example only women can become pregnant and bear and breastfeed children.

- ⇒ Although some women may have certain characteristics like men, such as hairy bodies, beards or broken voices, these are simply a result of hormonal imbalance.

Sex Discrimination: is any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women and men, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

Gender: refers to the socially and culturally constructed ideas about what it means to be male or female, that is the expected roles, relationships, behaviours, values and relative status, power or influence of males and females in society. Unlike sex, gender constructs are not fixed by biology or nature. They are learned ideas which are different across different cultures and societies and which are changeable over time within cultures and societies. How people in a particular society define women or men based on the different social roles played by either women or men. Gender is learnt through a process of socialisation and through the culture of the particular society concerned.

- ⇒ People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men.
- ⇒ They are taught what the appropriate behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities are for them, and how they should relate to other people.
- ⇒ This learned behaviour is what makes up gender identity, and determines gender roles and responsibilities. In many cultures boys are encouraged in the acts considered to display male traits (and girls vice versa) through the toys given to children (guns for boys, dolls for girls), the kind of discipline meted out, the jobs or careers to which they might aspire, and the portrayal of men and women in the media.
- ⇒ Children learn their gender from birth. They learn how they should behave in order to be perceived by others, and themselves, as either masculine or feminine.
- ⇒ Gender not only varies from one culture to another but it also varies within cultures over time; culture is not static but it keeps changing.

- ⇒ As societies become more complicated, the roles played by men and women are not only determined by culture but by sociopolitical and economic factors.

Gender Roles: are socially and culturally assigned functions, roles and responsibilities given to men and women based on traditions and values that shape attitudes and behaviors of members of a particular society. Gender roles are socially constructed and can therefore be changed from time to time. This division of labour by gender is the basis for gender discrimination and unequal sharing of resources. In a number of African societies, women are expected to carry out all the domestic roles associated with maintaining the home and sustaining the lives of the people in that home. For example in most communities women cook, fetch water, collect firewood, weed the gardens and look after the children. Men on the other hand are expected to work outside the home and be the bread winner. They hunt, build houses, graze the animals and open up the land for cultivation. However in some communities men do the cooking and look after children, while the women build houses. Much as the work done by women is a lot and very important, it is often not paid for. Gender roles vary from one culture to another and from one social, political, and economic grouping to another.

Gender Sensitive: Gender sensitivity is the act of being aware of the ways people think about gender, so that individuals rely less on assumptions about traditional and outdated views on the roles of men and women. It is an understanding of the socio-cultural factors underlying sex-based discrimination. A gender sensitive media is one that portrays the needs and interests of both men and women in its communication and endeavours to remove all barriers to women's full participation in all activities of society, including political participation.

Gender Equality: means that all human beings, regardless of sex, have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities in life and enjoy equality in law and both in the public and private sphere. It requires that the different needs, priorities, circumstances and aspirations of women and men be considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Sometimes gender equality requires that women and men be treated differently, for example by giving special preferences to women in order to counter-balance and eradicate historical or persistent

discrimination against them. Gender inequality can be tackled effectively only if policies in all areas, including the media are designed in such a way as to address the specific concerns, needs and constraints of both women and men while building on their respective capacities and contributions.

Gender Discrimination: is giving different treatment to different individuals on the basis of their gender or based on the roles and responsibilities given to women and men in any particular society at any given time. For example gender discrimination may involve the systemic and structural discrimination against women and men in the distribution of income, accessing education, health services, money, land, and also their participation in decision making.

Gendered Media Coverage and its Impact on Women Candidates

In Uganda's media female political candidates often receive less issue coverage than males, but more coverage on appearance, personality, and family. When the media talks about women's issue positions, they tend to frame them as "feminine" issues such as health care, food security, and education rather than as "masculine" issues like the budget, employment or national security. Often male candidates who talk about the same feminine issues tend to receive more coverage, making it difficult for voters to associate female candidates with any particular issue since both "masculine" and "feminine" issues can be associated with male candidates. In effect such portrayal directly affects the success of female candidates wishing to run for higher public offices, such as the presidency that require these "masculine issues" as essential for the job.

The media plays a very big role in shaping public opinion on politicians and public figures and the eventual election outcome. The use of "words, images, phrases and presentation styles" by the media shapes the voters' thinking and helps them to organise what they experience in everyday life, hence influencing their conclusion on an issue or a particular candidate. In most cases the media has the prerogative to determine what information it includes or excludes when communicating a particular topic, person or event, leaving the readers, listeners and viewers to fill in the gaps created.

Given that the media is the voters' main source of information about a candidate's personality, viability and policy positions, when there are gaps in the information provided, the readers or viewers revert to their own gender stereotypes to fill the vacuum hence completing their own image of the candidate. Often times

the media covers female candidates differently from their male counterparts, by exerting a powerful influence over the type of political information that reaches voters which reflects gender stereotypes and the public's established norms. Competent acts done by women that would have been taken for granted when performed by males, are portrayed as extraordinary and are often unduly 'fussed over'. The media brings it out as *"a kind of look at what she did and she is only a woman"* attitude. On occasions where a story goes against the given societal norms, it will most likely receive negative or less coverage since the female candidates would have broken the gender stereotypes as set for both women and politicians in general. The media then perpetuates this defined "rare" occurrence by promoting negative media attention or by giving female candidates less coverage than their male counterparts, hence determining the viability of their candidature.

As a result the media coverage then determines the number of women wishing to contest for and eventually get elected into public office. The more positive and visible female candidates are in the national media, the more likely other women will offer themselves to run for office. This means that the amount of coverage a particular female candidate receives is not only important to her success, but also affects the numbers of other female candidates that may join the race or get elected. As long as the media bias continues to portray female candidates as less viable than their male competitors, other women will be vulnerable regardless of whether or not they are viable candidates. Such coverage is not only unprofessional but contrary to the Journalists Code of Ethics.

Code of ethics observed by the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda, NIJU

1. No journalist shall disseminate information or allegations without establishing its correctness or truth.
2. No journalist shall disclose the source of his/her information and shall only divulge them in the event of an overriding consideration of public interest and within the framework of the law of Uganda.
3. No journalist shall solicit or accept bribes in an attempt to publish or suppress the publication of a story.

4. A journalist shall not plagiarise the professional work of others or expropriate works or results of research by scholars without acknowledging their contribution and naming his/her sources of information.
5. A journalist shall obtain his/her information through the skillful application of journalistic principles and shall never bribe or offer inducements to sources.
6. No journalist shall deny any person with legitimate claim a right to reply a statement. Correction and rejoinders are to be published in appropriate form without delay and in a way that will be noticed by those who have received the original information.
7. A journalist shall at all times strive to separate his/her own opinions from factual news. Where personal opinions are expressed, the public shall be made to know.
8. A journalist shall take the necessary steps to correct any damaging report made on any individual or organisation.
9. A journalist shall not originate or encourage the dissemination of information designed to promote or which may have the effect to promote tribalism, racism, or any other form of discrimination

Media Gender Biases

In Uganda, despite having more women joining the public realm, the media still applies certain gender filters to the coverage of female candidates no matter how masculinized they portray themselves. Much as there are some professional efforts to correct the gender bias in the news industry female candidates are still primarily described as a "Woman Candidate" and such portrayal shapes the voters' views and the character traits that voters see as appropriate for a candidate to hold for each political office. Generally these qualities are traditionally seen as fairly "masculine" and include things like decisiveness, being courageous, risk taking and confident. The media prefers portraying women candidates as attractive, meek, and delicate beings that need to be protected and deliberately avoid those qualities that are defined by society as "masculine", hence compromising their success in elective public office.

Most times, instead of concentrating on one's possession of the required competence for political office, the media covers the appearance, marital status, and other superficial characteristics of the female candidates and portray them as

passive political actors. The media continues to use sexist lenses to portray female candidates, hence their marginalisation at the polls. Generally the coverage given to them tends to change as they move higher on the political ladder because of the increased unconventionality of their candidacy. As women raise in the political ranks, like the case of Vice President Speciosa Kazibwe and the Speaker, Rebecca Kadaga, their coverage becomes increasingly negative. Their femininity is seen more of a disadvantage to their campaign and inevitably the media forces them to try and find a balance between remaining feminine but at the same time portraying a level of masculinity for the voters to have confidence in their ability to perform the tasks of the public office they are competing for. Unfortunately the heightened masculinity of public offices at the national level does not allow much room for interpretation of feminine qualities, hence pushing female politicians to submit to a double standard of maintaining their femininity while giving off just enough masculinity in order to be accepted as viable candidates.

Gender Stereotypes to Women's Leadership

Gender stereotyping is the constant portrayal or references given to women and men occupying certain roles. Stereotypes are set according to the socially constructed gender division of labour and expectations of behaviour in a particular society. For example, in many societies *“women are said to be a weaker sex”*; *“men are strong and powerful”*; *“men do not cry”*; *“women are too emotional”*; *“women are better in looking after children”*; *“men are rough”*; *“women are soft and tender”*, etc. Because of these stereotypes, certain occupations and positions are said to be suitable for men such as the military, presidency, mechanics, while women are said to be better nurses, nursery teachers and midwives.

Being a woman in many professional fields can be challenging, but for most, being a woman in politics or a candidate for an elective office is a living hell. In politics, women who are considered feminine are judged as incompetent, while women who are competent, unfeminine, who succeed in politics and public life are scrutinized under a different lens from that applied to successful men. Uganda's former vice president Dr. Kazibwe's story of domestic violence confirms the stereotypes she had to endure as a female politician. Kazibwe narrated that: *“Everyone thought my life was perfect. I had a husband, a career and money; my children were doing well at school and university, and yet I was miserable in my marriage because of the abuse. I finally had enough of living the life people expected me to lead and decided to break my silence about what was really going on”*.

Globally, the media has historically trivialized women's candidacies and portrayed them in stereotypical ways. On top of the cut throat smear campaigns and constant public scrutiny, female candidates are faced with sexist descriptions in the media, which reduces their credibility and makes them to be seen as less human. A lot of attention is paid to their appearance, personality, and family compared to their male counterparts. Usually the press portrays women as losers and amateurs and not serious candidates. The majority of the female traits applied to the women like being emotional and ability to fulfill female stereotypes of looking after their children and husbands, cooking for them and maintaining the home are negatively portrayed by the media.

Some of the Common Stereotypes in the Media

1. The Motherhood Brand

In most cultures women are defined by their sexual role of motherhood. The media, just like all patriarchal institutions, prefers to depict women candidates as mothers and therefore more caring and in a better position to appreciate the plight of the average voter. Therefore female candidates are expected to be more compassionate, loving and possibly honest; qualities largely associated with motherhood. Much as this could be an advantage, the same characterization is often turned around by the media to question women's ability to effectively perform the leadership roles that require decisiveness, courage and availability to the public call and at the same time fulfill their maternal responsibilities.

For instance, on the official Government of Uganda website Dr. Kazibwe, is described as: *“a Ugandan surgeon and politician, a “Nnalongo”,* because of her twin daughters, a Vice President of Uganda from 1994 to 2003 and the first woman in Africa to hold the position of vice-president of a sovereign nation”. Her description as a *“Nnalongo”* is the used by the media, both locally and internationally, to judge her as an absentee mother and wife, who sacrificed her family and husband in order to work at a professional level and as vice president. Many other women candidates and politicians are described in the same manner like, *“so and so... a mother of five or eight and wife to...”* This description is never applied to their male counterparts, who instead are reported as having money, academic qualifications and the networks required for the job. An example is reflected in an extraction from *The Red Pepper*, July 27, 2015, talking about the five aspirants for the position of the Youth MP for Western region. Despite having one female candidate, the title of the story referred to all the five as boys.

NRM BOYS FIGHT FOR KARUHANGA JOB: WHO WILL IT BE?				
Mark Ariho	Davis Akampulira	Mackline Nahweera	Edwin Agaba	Mpaka Mwine
He is a 3rd year law student and his father Herbert Innocent Barigye, a city lawyer is very close to President Museveni.	He has been at the campaign trail longer than anybody else and he too claims to have close links with state House.	The mother of one is a former Kyambogo University Guild President... and is so far the only lady in the race for western youth MP.	He is famously know as Go-Green because he is the CEO for the Ugandan Youth Go-Green, for which Museveni and Kadaga are the patrons.	He is the son to Minister Bright Rwamirama and he is the richest in the race, ever dangling dollars before the voters

In a similar manner, a woman leader or candidate who has not had biological children is castigated by the media, with an intention of emphasising that her failure to be a mother is an indicator of her inability to offer credible leadership to society. When the Speaker of Uganda's Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga chaired the session on the passing of the anti-homosexuality Bill, the motherhood plug was pulled by the media with: ***"...a woman is no woman until she bares children. Indeed a person is no person unless they are willing to breed."*** The writer continues to reprimand the Speaker by depicting motherhood as a fundamental duty for women and not leadership, asserting that, ***"Woman, meet your African cultural obligations and give birth! That's an order not a suggestion... Madam, stop whatever you are doing, go to the labour ward and push something out of you. You know that is a cardinal expectation of a good African woman!"***

Such uncalled for torments by society, which is often amplified by the media over biological issues that are not at all related to one's leadership capabilities often deter competent women from offering themselves for leadership positions.

The motherly role is also used by the media to identify women candidates or politicians as having emotional baggage and likely to engage in emotional outbursts when handling public issues. When describing women's public conduct, such words are often used like "motherly", "loving", "smiling", "teary", "tender-looking",

"fiery", and "stern-looking" hence depicting images of love, compassion, anger, scolding, punishment, or shrewd behavior by female politicians. This makes the female candidates likable, scarier or unlikable to those people that compare them to their overbearing mothers or an expectation of care giving to those that were deprived of love by their mothers.

2. Treating Women as "Children" or "Pets"

In other instances female candidates are symbolically adopted by male sponsors in political activities for public show or to rally support for other male candidates, hence creating an image of women being too weak, naive, or unprepared to handle "difficult political tasks" without the help of the men. A case in point is when an MP from Kabale, Hon. Ronah Ninsiima, was said to have been sponsored by the men to oust a woman, Hon. Hope Mwesigye, whose conduct was seen overbearing to the patriarchal structures in the district. Even after she joined parliament, Ninsiima's competency as a leader has always been questioned by the media, presenting her as a protégé of her male sponsors. Similarly, Hon. Florence Kashaka, a former MP for Kamwenge was often referred to as a "Kanyana", by President Museveni, a pet name that greatly diminished her leadership qualities in her constituency and capacity to fulfill her leadership functions. Women are often described using metaphors that draw on animals, children, or food. Animal terms focus on the appearance and sexuality of young women (foxy), and as women grow older, or are seen as too aggressive, they are referred to as "wild cat", or "cow".

Much as Hon. Winnie Byanyima's political competence is indisputable, having proved to Ugandans that she can interact with the media on equal terms, she has not been spared the characterisation that she is a member of the "weaker sex" who needs a man to come to her aid. Byanyima, a former MP for Mbarara Municipality and currently the Director for Oxfam International was asked to publicly produce her husband at a rally in Mbarara, when she contested to become a member of parliament. As a politician, her husband, a retired Colonel Kiiza Besigye has been described as "the master strategist behind the scenes for her success and the ordained head of 'the family'." In his enthusiasm to be Byanyima's godfather, Besigye has at times helped to amplify the sexist stereotypes for the media, by presenting her as a supporter of his political ambitions, a wife and mother to his son, Anselm. In the politics of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Byanyima is portrayed by the media as a very loyal, loving and supportive wife and not as a politician and a competent leader in her party in her own right.

3. The Iron Lady Syndrome

Many strong women are usually described by the media as “Iron ladies”, creating an image of a cold, ruthless and unapproachable person. The “iron lady image” can result in loss of the advantages women candidates may have or would have otherwise enjoyed. Such women who exhibit what society defines as masculine traits are often ridiculed or are forced to drop their positive personality traits or play into male political stereotypes that could be repelling the voters. Many strong women candidates are repeatedly described by the press as “overly ambitious,” “calculating,” “cold,” “scary,” and “intimidating.” When women project their competence by demonstrating masculine traits such as toughness, they are silenced with crude humor and often advised to be more feminine. Most journalists prefer dealing with women who are characterized as highly feminine and less threatening

Sexist Media Coverage of Female Politicians

This refers to the media coverage of both sexuality and sex roles. It applies to everything, ranging from clothing and appearance; being seen as a sex object; behaving or speaking in “feminine” ways; to being a victim of sexual harassment. Below are some of the sexist ways the media covers women candidates:

1. Descriptions of their vocal styles

The media gives too much attention to the vocal styles of female candidates as opposed to the male. Descriptions like “nagging,” “whining,” “soft-spoken,” “sexy,” “hoarse” and “shrill” are used when reporting a female candidate’s campaign speech or media appearance. Such descriptions tend to feminize and diminish women because of their gender, instead of giving emphasis to their actual words and message. In her profile, it was published that *“Though soft-spoken, Byanyima is a woman of strong character. From being elected a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1994, Byanyima went on to win the Mbarara Municipality parliamentary seat twice, including against Ngoma Ngime, the then official National Resistance Movement (NRM) candidate in 2001.”* Such a description depicts Byanyima as a soft woman, with her feminine traits, trying helplessly to infiltrate the men’s world.

2. Descriptions of their weight

Words such as “chubby”, “skinny”, “bummy”, “fatties”, “bottom-heavy figure”, “curvaceous”, “cleavage on display”, etc. are often used to describe women’s bodies. Although some male politicians can also be harassed for their weight, women’s bodies are more likely to be scrutinized in a sexist manner. A lot of media space is given to bums and hips of Minister Jessica Alupo and Judith Nabakooba, former police spokesperson, and now contesting for the Mityana seat, depicting both women as mere sex objects in the political field. Several female candidates and politicians have been victimised by the media because of having some “flesh” or not having it.

3. Descriptions of their Clothes

It is true that in politics appearance is everything. While the press rarely reports about the make of a suit or the colors of a tie that the male politicians will wear, a female politician’s clothing is always over-analyzed for symbolism, whether it is a pantsuit, heels, skirt, blouse, busuti, evening dress, or open shoes, showing off her peeping toes. A lot of media attention is given to a female candidate’s wardrobe or fashion choices as opposed to her policy positions, hence the description that a female candidate “dresses for pretty rather than powerful”. The opening paragraph of the *The Telegraph about Uganda’s Vice President Dr. Kazibwe* reads: “AFRICA’S highest-ranking woman politician, resplendent in her vivid green traditional robes and surrounded by deferential bagmen and bodyguards, is hardly the image of a battered wife.” A similar description was given to the Speaker, Kadaga, when she went to the NRM to pick the nomination forms. Hello! a Kampala daily reported: “On Monday, she appeared at the NRM Secretariat in Kyadondo donning a yellow ‘gomesi’ dotted with black spots to pick her nomination forms”. Such portrayal simply reduces women candidates to fashion freaks and plays down their competency as politicians.

4. Calling Female Candidates “ambitious”

Naturally every politician is ambitious but this gender neutral word is often used to promote the idea that women are not naturally suited for politics, or that they have to move mountains in order to succeed in this area. One critic of Speaker Rebecca Kadaga’s presidential ambitions wrote: “*You show absolutely no fear of men...You speak while they speak. You get involved in political affairs as if you are a man. The other day, you shut up the prime minister - a whole man!*”

... You keep on talking smart in that manner ... A good African woman is seen not heard. Stop talking smart and also use the silence to reflect on what a bad African woman you have been.” Kadaga was eventually cowered out of nursing any presidential ambitions.

5. Talking about their Parenting Role

Female candidates and politicians are usually reported as mothers or “Mummy”, “Aunt” or “Mama wa Baana” – the mother of many children. Being a mother is mentioned prominently and repeatedly included in all news stories for women candidates. This however is not the same for the men. A female candidate who has children, and displays them so prominently in her campaign, often invites questions from the press about whether it is possible to juggle roles as a mother and a politician and whether the public role she is aspiring for will not deprive the children of their mother. When men run for office and have young children, it is immediately expected that there will be a “first” or “second” mother somewhere.

6. Descriptions of their age

Women are often criticised as too young or too old to run for political office and yet much older men are not reported about in such a manner. This is not only locally defined but an international phenomenon. When a photo of a tired-looking Hillary Clinton appeared in *The Drudge Report*, a journalist wrote that “as you age—and . . . you know women are hardest hit on this . . . America loses interest in you.” Thus, the question for voters became: “Will this country want to actually watch a woman get older before their eyes on a daily basis?” Giving an obituary of Joy Arinaitwe a parliamentarian said “And when that child became a woman and joined politics, she chose the NRM party on whose ticket she made it to Parliament as Buhweju Woman MP. Although she joined Parliament in May 2011, Joy Kariisa Arinaitwe, 27, only participated in the House business for just six months. For the rest of the time, she was in and out of hospital due to poor health.” Another parliamentary colleague said of her: “Some of us are going to miss Kariisa because she was young and calm ... she had a bright political future but the people of Buhweju have lost her.” Similar description was given to Celina Nebanda, deceased MP for Butaleja, making these two female politicians as being young and therefore unfit to be in parliament.

7. Reducing women to individual body parts

It is a common practice to reduce women candidates to a collection of body parts by talking about their youthful appearance, sexiness, long legs, large bust and waistline. Some journalists think by depicting women candidates as sex objects they are promoting their popularity and they justify such irresponsible action that *“Men want a sexy woman and want to mate with her, while women want to idealize about a sexy woman and want to be her”*. One Ugandan columnist, Abbey Kibirige Semuwemba justifies his sexist commentary and asserts: *“The fact is that a woman’s body has historically been a subject of regulation, discipline, debate and management. The woman’s body represents the place to project the memories and fantasies of racial, religious and cultural authenticity. Most African men tend to be attracted to the ‘big’ thighs and bums of women... As a matter of fact, female beauty has always been so pervasive, so profoundly ambiguous such that we all interpret it differently.”*

8. Marital Status

Women candidates are usually described as *“a devoted wife and a mother of so many children”*. Again Rebecca Kadaga has been repeatedly harassed for not having a man or husband by her side. One writer wrote: *“...get a husband. I don’t understand you woman of these days. Going around without husbands as if you are not African. Get a man or you will remain worthless ... Preferably, get a real man who can show you some love by routinely beating you... No offspring, no husband and you still think you are protecting the traditional African family.”* Kadaga while addressing a Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) at an end of year dinner, under the theme, “My personal leadership journey; how I made it to the top”, also pointed out that in the run-up to the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections where she had contested against four men in Buzaaya, people had made it a habit to ask her who her husband was. During one rally, she said, a haggard looking man asked her the same question to which she replied: *“But you, do you think you can marry me?”* to the man’s shock. She said from then on, nobody ever raised the question again. At most campaigns the issue of husbands is often brought out by the voters and amplified by the media, hence impacting negatively on the female candidates. The experience Kadaga suffered at that time has caused her to never dare contest against male candidates, despite her numerous achievements as a politician.

9. Not taken Seriously

Female candidates are often taken less seriously at the beginning of a campaign and are referred to by their first names while their male opponents are called "Mister", "Doctor", or "Professor". However, strangers, acquaintances, subordinates, and media commentators tend to refer to female candidates by their first names, much as it is not done for males. For example Dr. Kazibwe was commonly known as "Spe" or "Speciosa" and yet Museveni is "President Museveni". Similarly Engineer Winnie Byanyima is referred to as "Winnie" while Besigye is known as "Retired Col. Dr. Kiiza Besigye". Much as women candidates at times contribute to this problem by using only their first names in their campaign literature, such language choice should not be amplified by the media since it reinforces gender stereotypes and may affect the outcome of the election with male candidates being seen as more competent and viable.

How does Media Sexism Affect Women Candidates?

- ⇒ When voters are presented with a neutral description of a male and a female candidate, some begin to believe that the female candidate is more likely to care about ordinary people, share their values, and is trustworthy. Usually a female candidate is seen as more honest and ethical than the male.
- ⇒ Some voters tend to think that a female candidate is in politics for the right reasons and she is less corruptible, more honest and having higher integrity than her male counterpart.
- ⇒ Putting female candidates on a platform of "virtue" is however disadvantageous since there is a tendency for voters to punish them more harshly at any slight scandal or failure in their role as public leaders. Females are more harshly judged than their male counterparts and their failures are attributed to all women.
- ⇒ Female candidates are usually punished more harshly than male candidates for negative campaigning. In case of sexist attacks, female candidates are usually advised not to respond for fear that making an issue out of sexism would only hurt them more. It is also feared that any response by an aggrieved female candidate could potentially spark off a barrage of media stories questioning whether such attacks were sexist, hence shifting the focus of the debate of relevant issues in the campaign.

There is enough research to show that ignoring sexist attacks is detrimental to female candidates. Much as sexist coverage of female candidates could affect the voters' likelihood to vote for them, a direct response in the media by the candidate makes up for lost ground. Women can always recover voter confidence from sexist media coverage by directly addressing it, and standing up for all current and future women leaders. Thus the media should give women candidates and politicians to give a response to any sexist coverage so as to redeem their public image. Responsible journalism demands that fair and objective coverage is given to everybody irrespective of gender.

Tips for Journalists

1. Avoid using sexist language in press reports. It does not matter whether the attacks come from opposing candidates or other media sources. At all times, the media is expected to be an objective source of information to the electorate.
2. Be aware of common sexism that has been normalized by patriarchy; the unequal gender relations and culture as well as personal notions about gender, language and image, as well as how individuals express these notions.
3. Always strive to enhance gender awareness for both candidates and members of the media so as to combat sexism.
4. Always be aware that subtle sexism can actually be far more damaging to female candidates than deliberate and outrageous sexism since it is harder for female candidates to respond directly to subtly tilted coverage against them, especially when the reporters are not even aware they are being sexist.
5. Do not blame female candidates who are mistreated in a sexist manner, by criticizing them that: "they are playing the gender card."
6. Evaluate the terms used for women candidates that would not be used about men.
7. Do not cite sex with less seriousness or logical relation to content just like you avoid mentioning one's tribe, class, or religion. For example in most cases when reporting about a male candidate, on first reference, a male candidate is referred to as "Mr. Mukasa", and then "Mukasa" after that. However for a female candidate, journalists will refer to her as "Miss or Mrs. Mukasa"

throughout their narrative, thus granting autonomy to Mr. Mukasa, while emphasising the description of Ms. Mukasa's marital status.

8. Do not describe a female candidate's clothing or physical appearance (hair style, makeup, eyes, breasts, bum, etc.) ... UNLESS you can publish similar articles about male candidates.
9. Do not talk about a female candidate as a mother ... UNLESS the candidate brings it up first and ask a male candidate about his role as a father if he advertises "fatherhood" as a job qualifier.

Critical "Don'ts" for the Media During Campaigns

- ⇒ Don't mention her young children unless you would also mention his.
- ⇒ Don't describe her clothes unless you would describe his.
- ⇒ Don't say she's shrill or attractive unless the same adjectives would be applied to a man.
- ⇒ Don't say she has had facial surgery unless you say he dyes his hair or has hair plugs.
- ⇒ Don't say she's just out of graduate school but he's a rising star.
- ⇒ Don't say she has no professional training but he worked his way up.
- ⇒ Don't ask her if she's running as a women's candidate unless you ask him if he's running as a men's candidate.

Adopted from: Name it. Change it. Sexism & Equality don't Mix, The Women's Media Center's Media Guide to Gender Neutral Coverage of Women Candidates + Politicians By Rachel Joy Larris and Rosalie Maggio

Language, Sexism and how it can be Avoided

- ⇒ **Aggressive**-This is often used negatively to describe a woman that is assertive, powerful, intelligent, confident, decisive, determined and possibly courageous. On the other hand men with similar character traits will be described as successful, confident leaders, who know what they want.
- ⇒ **Balls**-These are male testicles, which women do not have. This word is often used metaphorically to mean a woman having guts, courage, nerve, bravery, self-assurance, confidence, determination, and stamina.

- ⇒ **Bitch**-This is one of the most loaded of the sexist words, which is used to describe women who are “active, direct, blunt, obnoxious, competent, loud-mouthed, independent, stubborn, demanding, achieving, overwhelming, vigorous, strong-minded, scary, ambitious, tough, harsh, boisterous, turbulent, sprawling, strident, striding, and large (physically, spiritually and/or subconsciously). When used as an insult, the word is most often aimed at women who speak their minds; who have personal opinions that contradict conventional wisdom, and who do not shy away from expressing them. This word is often used against strong women by those who feel threatened by branding them as ruthless, aggressive, domineering, controlling, powerful, tyrannical, overwhelming, overpowering, spiteful, malicious, cruel, wicked, vicious, cold-hearted, hardhearted, and merciless.
- ⇒ **Catfights**-This word is often used by the media when women disagree with each other. The encounter is often stereotyped as a catfight. Men's disagreements are not called catfights or dogfights or anything else; they are simply arguments, debates, discussions, conflicts, or disputes.
- ⇒ **Family Man**-This terminology is often used to describe men that stay-at-home, are family heads, home-lovers, family-oriented/family-centered/home-centered person, someone devoted to the family. However there is no parallel for women since it is assumed that all women are “family women”.
- ⇒ **Feminine/femininity**-These two words are stereotypes that convey different meanings to different people according to their perceptions of what a woman ought to be or ought not do. It includes what a woman says, thinks, wears, feels, or looks like. Instead, of using such words, the media could use specific descriptive adjectives for the qualities it wants to express such as: gracious, warm, gentle, thoughtful, sensitive, loyal, receptive, supportive, compassionate, expressive, affectionate, tender, charming, nurturing, well-mannered, cooperative, neat, soft-spoken, considerate, and kind.
- ⇒ **Gentleman's Agreement**-This is an unwritten/informal/oral/honorable/verbal agreement, verbal/oral promise/contract, handshake, your word, mutual understanding.
- ⇒ **Girl (referring to a woman) or young woman**-The description of a “Girl” is reserved for pre-teens or at the most for those 18 years or under. It is

objectionable and demeaning when used by men of the media for younger women in their 20s and 30s or women in general. Women are described as “girlish” when they are perceived to be naive, childlike, innocent, open, friendly, eager, youthful, immature, self-conscious, incompetent, unskilled, childish, unsophisticated, juvenile, or inexperienced.

- ⇒ **Gossip**-This is a functionally sexist term that is largely reserved for women. It is often used to describe women's conversations or discussion. The term is then used to describe women as rumormongers, whisperers, talebearers, blabbermouths, big mouth, mudslinger, motor-mouth, loose tongue, idle talker; idle/small/empty talk, etc.
- ⇒ **Irrational**-This term is too often used as a rebuttal of women's arguments or applied inaccurately to women as a catch-all condemnation. The media should restrain itself from using this term in reference to women if it does not apply it in the same way for men.
- ⇒ **Ladies' Man**-This term is problematic because there is no precise equivalent for women - “gentlemen's woman”, and because of the use of “ladies.” It is used to describe men that are popular or successful with the women, a heartbreaker, or a smooth operator.
- ⇒ **Lady**-In its traditional use, “lady” defines women as ornaments or decorations rather than real people, as referees of both good manners and morals, as members of a leisured class, as beings removed from any hint of sexuality, as needing protection from real life, as “too good” or “too special” to “dirty their hands”; as such, it is classist, condescending, trivializing, and old-fashioned.
- ⇒ **Lady-like**-When used, this term conveys different meanings according to people's perceptions of what a woman ought or ought not do, say, think, wear, feel, or look like. Being “ladylike” is a subjective cultural judgment. It is often used to describe women as courteous, well-mannered, civil, polite, tender, cooperative, neat, soft-spoken, gentle, aristocratic, cultured, elegant, proper, correct, gracious, considerate, refined, well-bred, kind, well-spoken.
- ⇒ **Be like Man/Act like a Man/Be a Man/Take it like a Man**-Such phrases are often used by the media to caution me to be brave/bold, defy, bear up, meet/confront with courage/bravery/valor/boldness, hold up one's head, take heart, face the music, act courageously/bravely/wisely/straightforwardly/honorably, show fortitude/patience/determination/

strength/vigor, stand up for oneself, be independent/resolute/unflinching/earnest. Expressions like “Be a man” can be used to oppress men while at the same time implying that women are not bold, courageous, straightforward, or hardy. Being “manlike” or “manly” is used by the media to imply courageous, strong, brave, upright, honorable, mature, noble, resolute, straightforward, vigorous, adventurous, spirited, direct, competitive, physical, mechanical, logical, rude, active, and self-confident.

- ⇒ **Womanlike/Womanliness/Womanly**-These vague and subjective cultural stereotypes convey different meanings to different people according to their perceptions of what a woman ought or ought not do, say, think, feel, and look like. The media should instead use words that express precise characteristics such as: gracious/graciousness, warm/warmth, gentle/gentleness, receptive/receptivity, supportive/supportiveness, tender/tenderness, charming/charm, sympathetic/sympathy, nurturing/nurturance, well-mannered/good breeding, considerate/consideration, kind/kindness, intuitive/intuition, strong/gentle strength. These words may be used equally appropriately of a man. They are not synonymous with the sexist terms, but are rather what people generally seem to mean by them.
- ⇒ **Motherly**-This word should not be used to describe women's behaviour. Instead the media could use words like: warm, nurturing, loving, kind, kindly, protective, supportive, caring, solicitous, considerate, interested, benevolent, good-natured, fond, affectionate, devoted, tender, gentle, demonstrative, sympathetic, understanding, indulgent, obliging, forbearing, tolerant, well-meaning, sheltering, generous. These words also apply to men; they are not synonyms for “motherly” but rather what people seem to mean by it.
- ⇒ **Nagging**-This word is used almost exclusively for women, while in the same situation, men are said to bully, complain, or plain talk. Instead of using the word to nag, other alternatives could be used like complain, criticize, scold, find fault, pester, harass, grumble, have a bone to pick with; persist, lobby, push, press, ask again, tell, say, remind, repeat, or reiterate.
- ⇒ **Whine**-This word is functionally sexist since it is used primarily of women and children, while in similar circumstances, men are said to ask, tell, repeat, complain, criticize, or just plain talk. Instead of using such a word the media could say: complain, grumble, fume, find fault, be dissatisfied, pester, or harass.

⇒ **Women's Issues**-This phrase is usually used by politicians and the media to family, political, social, ethical, economic, and human issues to discount or down play and stereotype issues such as abortion rights, ageism, childcare, divorce, domestic violence, the Equal Rights Commission, flextime, parental leave, poverty, rape, and sexual harassment.

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