WOMEN’S VOICE IN HUMANITARIAN MEDIA. NO SURPRISES.
#PRESSFORPROGRESS
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This paper is part of Humanitarian Advisory Group’s Diverse Leadership research project.
Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

Humanitarian Horizons is a three-year research initiative. The program adds unique value to humanitarian action in Asian and Pacific contexts by generating evidence-based research and creating conversation for change. The program is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
Why Media Matters

Media has an important role to play in advancing gender parity in the workplace because, through its representation of different social groups, it has the power to shape individual behaviour. Media has significant influence on how people perceive women as leaders. Research from the United States demonstrates that media shapes the perceptions of business leaders based on their gender, and has a particular influence on the public’s judgement of female politicians’ likeability.

Gender equality of experts in media matters because it sends a symbolic message about who has the credibility to be an expert and can provide access to power. The experts quoted are provided authority and the means to frame policies, debates and decisions.

Media also influences how women perceive themselves and their leadership aspirations. An experimental study from 2012 found women exposed to images depicting counter-stereotypical roles reported stronger non-traditional gender role beliefs, less negative self-perceptions and greater leadership aspirations than women exposed to images depicting stereotypical gender roles.
GENDER PARITY IN THE MEDIA

“In many cases, media not only reflects inequalities between men and women, but also amplifies and entrenches them.”

Underrepresentation of women as sources in media is evident and widespread and seems to have remained static in recent times. Studies report the following gender breakdown of sources:

Global media in 2015 - exactly the same as in 2010:
- Women: 24%
- Men: 76%

Australia’s metropolitan print media in 2016:
- Women: 21%
- Men: 79%

Australia’s ABC media in 2015:
- Women: 26%
- Men: 74%

Even in Finland, a progressive Nordic country, fewer than 30% of experts interviewed in the news media are women.

Women are not only underrepresented in the media; they are often shown in stereotypical, less powerful feminine roles. This is reflected in the topics on which women are quoted. In the 2016 analysis of Australia’s media mentioned above, women were more likely than men to be quoted on stereotypical “female” issues, including parenting, childcare, paid parental leave, gender discrimination, family violence, and women in the workforce.

Gender stereotypes, repeated and perpetuated by the media, can impact women’s leadership. Gender stereotypes have been connected to workplace discrimination. They are thought to produce bias in performance evaluations, resulting in equally competent women not advancing as far in an organisation as an equivalent-performing man.

Gender parity for women’s voices in media requires not only increased representation, but the portrayal of women in ways that are less beholden to gender stereotypes.

“Media tell us our roles in society. They tell us who we are and what we can be. They frame, interpret and amplify our policies and our politics. They tell us who has power and who matters.”

Julie Burton, President, Women’s Media Center
A SNAPSHOT: WOMEN IN HUMANITARIAN MEDIA

Humanitarian Advisory Group analysed articles from a mainstream news media outlet and a specialised humanitarian news media outlet over a four-week period in October 2017.

The good news: women as authors of humanitarian media are equally represented in one mainstream media outlet:

Al Jazeera must be congratulated for its almost equal split of authorship over the period. This is a significant achievement; in a 2017 review of the 20 top news outlets in the United States, the Women’s Media Centre found women produced only 37.7% of news reports.21 Female authorship in a specialised humanitarian news media outlet,22 reportedly reaching millions of people every month, and with a substantial influence on humanitarian issues and policy, was less equal.

This is important, in part because female authors were more likely to quote female sources than male authors. The 2016 Women for Media Report found male authors quoted 17% women; female authors quoted 27% women.23

No surprises. Underrepresentation in voice.

There was a significant disparity between the number of female and male sources quoted in the humanitarian media analysed.

The gender distribution of experts or officials quoted in humanitarian media reflects broader media analysis. The studies listed previously report 20–26% representation of women as sources in media, and less than 30% of women as experts in Finnish media.

While this underrepresentation is influenced by the gender difference in humanitarian leadership, it is still substantially less than the percentage of female leadership across the humanitarian sector as a whole (if the 33% female representation among humanitarian coordinators and deputy humanitarian coordinators can be used as a proxy across the sector). It is also lower than the number of women in the most senior roles from the United Nations more broadly (27%).24

Gaven Morris, Director of News at the ABC, suggests that while underrepresentation of women in media is partly due to underrepresentation at the top of fields such as politics, business and sport, it is “also to do with busy journalists needing to think more broadly and make the effort to inject fresh blood into their contact books”.25 Lisa Cornish, Senior Reporter for Devex, says that media units will put her in touch with their heads of organisation, who are often male. She says it’s important to get the organisation to think about equality in leadership, but also about putting more female representatives forward to media organisations.
WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- **Acknowledge the positive**
  Outlets like Al Jazeera, with gender parity in reporting, should be highlighted and celebrated.

- **Build evidence**
  While this paper serves to start the conversation, more evidence about the gender disparity in humanitarian media is needed, based on more sources, with more analysis, including of the portrayal of women in humanitarian media.

- **Understand the impact**
  Research the impact of unequal media representation on women in humanitarian leadership.

- **Raise awareness**
  Awareness is powerful. Devex Senior Reporter Lisa Cornish says that being aware of this issue as a journalist is extremely important in broadening representation of women and specifically seeking them for interview. The evidence supports this. The ABC found the interview time dedicated to women increased from 20% to 26% in just 12 months after its first study of gender parity – an improvement which its Director of News attributed to increased awareness.26 Similarly, a randomised control trial in the United States demonstrated that exposure to the science behind gender bias through training was effective in changing behaviours to address gender inequity, and concluded that such training should support the career advancement of women.27

- **Support journalists and organisations to work together**
  Lisa Cornish highlighted the importance of involving both journalists and organisations in efforts to increase female representation. Resources are available to support journalists to seek out female sources, and to be mindful of the gender stereotypes that can be exacerbated through media. Organisations must continue to work to strengthen gender parity at senior levels, and can be proactive in suggesting female representatives for media requests. News media outlets can consider joining the UN Women Step It Up For Gender Equality Media Compact, in which media outlets are invited to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by disrupting stereotypes and biases in their reporting and increasing the number of women in the media, including in leadership roles.28

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METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a high-level rapid analysis of two global news media outlets, including one specialising in humanitarian news. All articles on humanitarian issues in the four-week period from 2–29 October 2017 were identified. Author attribution in each report was used to determine gender, and corroboration was provided by a follow-on search. The gender of experts or officials quoted in the articles, such as formal spokespersons, mayors, chiefs, heads of agencies or departments and lawyers; the gender of victims, refugees, residents, bystanders or unnamed person gender was not. News media outlets were selected based on the ease of use of their search function over a specified period. Three major news outlets were excluded because their search function limited results to 100 items.
REFERENCES


5 Heiglcn et al. (2002) in Ibid.


7 Bligh et al. (2011) ‘Competent enough, but would you vote for her? Gender stereotypes and media influences on perceptions of women politicians’. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 42.3 pp560-597.


19 Collins (2011) ‘Content analysis of gender roles in media: where are we now and where should we go’, Sex Roles, 64 pp290-298.


22 Humanitarian Advisory Group has chosen not to name this specialised media outlet. It was selected because of its easy-to-use search function and high coverage of humanitarian issues during the period. The less equal authorship is unlikely to be specific to this outlet, and we do not intend to focus this debate on specific outlets, except to highlight the positive, without further data.


26 Ibid.

