



Pierre Diem is a baby who grows and grows but won't grow up. Despite feeding him courses, tips and techniques, he's just won't give up his old bad habits. But he keeps on attending courses – they're a great source of pocket money for electronic equipment.

“Women miners toil for R1 200 a day”, reads the headline of the front page of a leading South African newspaper. But, the sub-heading goes on, “Pioneers who have broken into a man's world are not complaining”. Really?

The only reason that women are being hired is that they are willing to work for lower wages than men.

The story is told mainly from the perspective of the male employer and union official who see nothing wrong with violating minimum wage regulations. The one woman interviewed is identified by name, at her work place. The several bodies in South Africa set up to protect human rights are not consulted.

When 16 journalists from mainstream media attending a course on investigative journalism at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) stopped to think about it, they agreed that the real story here is not about women happy to pick up any crumbs from the table but about **blatant sex discrimination** in the new South Africa – both a more accurate and more interesting angle. Yet without the gender blinders being lifted, none of them would have seen this; after all a star female reporter and all who make up the editorial cast of a leading newspaper had similarly missed the point.

Since the advent of the media, trainers have struggled to understand how to go about training in such a hands-on field, leaving aside how to undo the years of socialisation and prejudices that we bring to the business of news making. And that still leaves us reeling with how to measure whether it is really the training that makes a difference; to quote Rhodes University's Prof Guy Berger, how can we point with certainty and say: **“It's the training that did it!”**

After running some 39 training workshops in 12 Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries involving 600 media practitioners and trainers over the last two years, Gender Links is convinced that there is no shortcut to training in our quest to rid the media of its sexist baggage. Anecdotal evidence suggests that training can make a difference. But we are constantly finding new ways of making these interventions more effective, as well as new tools for measuring progress.

Let's start with what we are up against. Last September, Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) conducted the first-ever gender and media baseline study of the region. Involving 12 countries and over 25 000 news items spanning one month, the study is also the largest ever to have been conducted globally. Findings include the fact that:

- ★ on average, women in the region constitute 17% of news sources (compared to 18% globally);
 - ★ women are not even heard in proportion to their strength in occupational categories. For example, although women in the region constitute 18% of members of parliament, they only constituted 8% of news sources in this category;
 - ★ women's voices are especially under-represented in the hard news categories of economics, politics, disaster and war and – of course – sport;
 - ★ the only news category in which women's voices predominated was that of gender equality; but this – one of the major social revolutions of our time – only constituted 2% of all the news items.
- The issue is not just one of the under-representation of women, but the way they are portrayed. The study confirmed global findings that to the extent women are heard and seen in the media, they are invariably either victims of violence or fashion models; blamed for their fate and lacking in any attributes beyond their physical looks. Women are, in any case, much more likely to be seen than heard.

Not surprisingly, the only category in which women predominate as media practitioners is as news presenters. They are least well represented in the print media (22%). Other studies show that women in Southern Africa constitute less than 5% of media managers in the region.

No media manager is likely to deny these facts, even if they are invariably met with a myriad of excuses. Stepping back for a moment, the demise of apartheid and advent of multiparty democracy across the region over the last decade has led to an unshackling of the media and a new crusade around freedom of expression as well as the financial viability

of the media. **In one breath, media managers will tell you that not having women's voices heard in proportion to their strength in the population is an insidious form of censorship, while justifying the male bias of the news and objectification of women as essential to the bottom line.**

The increasing sophistication of the media, especially technologically, is leading to greater store being placed on media training. But the only training for which the cash-strapped media industry is likely to put up even a portion of the resources, is for skills or technical-related training. Few of these courses seem able to integrate skills and knowledge (computer-aided research for example, is a key tool of investigative reporting) let alone tackle a subject as vast and cross-cutting as gender that runs far deeper than any knowledge or skills training because it requires us to challenge not just what we know, but who we are and how we behave.

Against this background, Gender Links has sought to identify key strategic entry points including:

- ★ Pilot projects to mainstream gender into media training. This began with the IAJ project that involved building a gender component into all aspects of the in-service courses offered – from the beat-related training like human rights, race and ethnicity, sustainable development, etc to the skills-based training such as subediting and information technology. GL is currently involved in a similar project with the Polytechnic of Namibia, which offers entry-level training. This approach has the advantage that it reaches those who would scoff at the idea of coming to a gender and media course, yet who find that their eyes are opened to new possibilities in the middle of a course on say investigative reporting. Entry-level training has the huge advantage that it reaches young reporters before they are too set in their ways.

- ★ Thematic training. Each year we pick a particular theme on gender and the media and work in partnership with training institutions around the region to run intensive training courses for media practitioners. These themes have included gender violence; gender, HIV/Aids and the media; and – coming next year, when there will be six elections in the region – gender and democracy. Through prior arrangement, mainstream media houses carry supplements and programmes produced as part of the training. Participants have to produce two pieces after the training and before they receive their certificates. The courses include a two-hour briefing with editors on course content. Training is followed by six weeks of online follow-up. Participants are encouraged to form or join the Southern African Gender and Media Network. This approach has several advantages. Co-facilitating with local media trainers is a means of on-the-job training. The training methodology is process and outcome-driven rather than event-driven. Taking different themes each year is a constant reminder that gender cuts across every topic and is a way of reinforcing training. The engagement with editors seeks to ensure a more responsive environment for the practitioners to return to. **And, despite the enormous difficulties that Internet connectivity still poses, we believe that this is a tool that we must harness to our advantage.**

- ★ Developing training tools. In all our training, we develop, with other trainers, tools for ongoing use. The IAJ pilot project led to Gender in Media Training: a Southern African Tool Kit; the Polytechnic of Namibia is developing a manual on basic journalism in which gender is well integrated; and our thematic training has yielded manuals on covering gender violence, gender and HIV/Aids, etc. We are also developing tools in different functional areas of media, including gender and images, a video on how electronic news is constructed and (in the future) gender and subediting.

- ★ Training of trainers. Gender Links is a member of the Southern African Media Trainers Network (Samtran). We have used this forum to disseminate our research and training materials, as well as conduct three training-of-trainer workshops in the belief that our best hope of a long term

multiplier effect is to work in and through media training institutions.

Among our successes we count:

- ★ The feedback from participants in training which suggests that gender training is a true eye-opener and improved quality of coverage in the articles that are submitted after training.
- ★ New columns and programmes that have started as a direct result of the training. For example, in Mauritius a participant has started a weekly TV programme called Her portrait that tracks the lives of women who are challenging stereotypes, like a woman diver, ranger in a crocodile ranch, etc. In Zambia, a radio manager has started a "gender dialogue" every Sunday morning. Both of these examples are males.
- ★ Feedback from trainers who are regularly using our training tools and are integrating gender into their courses, including many universities (such as Stellenbosch, Rhodes, the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe, University of Swaziland, University of Botswana) that are integrating gender into media studies, or making links with their gender studies departments.
- ★ Feedback from mainstream media houses that we have engaged with, for example, through developing supplements together, which suggests that the awareness raised has made a difference (for example, the Voice newspaper in Botswana).

Five years from now, Gender Links and Misa plan to repeat the baseline study and this will be a good empirical measure of whether our efforts are bearing fruit. In the meanwhile, our experiences are leading us into some exciting new approaches to training.

On 28 June 2003, Gender Links and a number of NGO partners made an input into the annual general meeting of the Southern African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) devoted (for the first time in Sanef's history) to gender and the media. This in itself is a measure of progress. It also yielded practical ideas on training. One of the difficulties we have experienced is getting busy journalists off the beat long enough for training, and the related problem of how to keep track of them thereafter. The editors suggested that trainers come into newsrooms and start at the stage of the diary meeting, helping to shape and critique ideas, content and the packaging of actual stories. This on-the-job training has much to commend it, especially when it has the backing of senior management as it **removes all ivory towers** and ensures transformation where we need it – in the newsroom.

Indeed, as one of our follow-up initiatives to the Gender Media Baseline Study, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, we have started gender mainstreaming pilot projects with two media houses – the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation and Times of Zambia. These involve a thorough analysis of gender both in the institutional make-up of the organisation and in the editorial content; in-house workshops to devise gender policies; gender awareness training; implementation of the policies and evaluations of the outcome.

The comprehensive approach aims to ensure that gender is – to borrow the latest media phrase – **"embedded"** in every facet of media businesses. We believe this is ultimately the best way of ensuring transformation that is long term and not dependent on individuals, even though **champions** for the cause will always be necessary.

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by Colleen Lowe Morna

Get it the training burning