



Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape

First study: Yangon and beyond



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Tang Nyeng, Kachin News, Moe Myit Kyaw, Myit Ma Kha News Agency and Esther from Kachin News.
Photo: Petra Quiding

Dear reader,

Media plays a significant role in all societies, and especially in transformative societies like Myanmar. This is the first study of its kind ever conducted in Myanmar, seeking to illuminate the current general status of the Myanmar media industry from a gender perspective. The report also aims to identify minimum standards to protect and promote gender equality within Myanmar's media industry and to provide practical recommendations that could enhance gender understanding among media practitioners.

Myanmar is a country undergoing rapid socio-political transition, following the introduction of a new constitution in 2008 and the assumption of office by a new government. After many years of media suppression by its military rulers the media industry in Myanmar continues to face serious challenges as it struggles to re-emerge.

Even though female media practitioners are being well represented in the newsrooms, forming over 50% of staff, media institutions remain significantly male-dominated at decision-making level. This results in two main challenges for women within the industry – the lack of opportunity to advance their careers and the absence of institutional mechanisms supportive of women media workers.

Based on UNESCO's model curriculum for journalism education, this study was undertaken acknowledging media's essential role in the promotion of equity and equality in the Myanmar society. To change the existing gender roles the media itself must mirror gender equity within the media institutions, both in policy and practice.

The fixed gender images, drawn from entrenched prejudices, contribute to the notion that women are weak, unable to make decisions or to undertake serious work, and therefore, unworthy of being promoted, of receiving equal pay for equal work and to be entitled to certain employment rights.

A professional media that respects gender equity, promotes liberal values and a plural society can positively contribute to a country in transition like Myanmar and help shape its future.

The data gathered through this survey and the analyses are expected to be used in strategizing the educational programme of the newly established Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJII) as well as to inform the media industry at large.

This first report focuses mainly on Yangon but also contains materials collected through questionnaires in five regions (cities). A subsequent follow-up with a stronger emphasis on non Yangon areas will be carried out later in 2015, in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the complex reality that forms the media in Myanmar

Lars Tallert,

International Director, Fojo Media Institute

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are grateful to International Media Support (IMS) and Sweden (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) for supporting this study on gender and the Myanmar media. We are indebted to all participants of focus group, interviewees and respondents of questionnaires who generously gave their time and shared their experiences to make this study participatory, comprehensive, and rich.

TEAM

The study was lead by Agneta Söderberg Jacobson, Project Manager for Fojo Media Institute, Sweden. The field research team included Dilrukshi Handunnetti (international gender consultant and Gender Co-Coordinator for the International Federation of Journalists for the Asia-Pacific Region) and Pyo Let Han (local research consultant). Björn Widmark of Fojo Media Institute edited the research.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gender and the Myanmar Landscape report was undertaken to inform the Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJI) as well as the media industry at large on the current status of gender equity in Myanmar and shed light on the relative position of the women in media, their role and representation in networks and other professional bodies.

The entire research effort included 148 respondents, including 121 survey respondents, in total 69 women and 52 men.

The research questions focused to derive answers to the following:

1. Women's representation in media houses, including women in decision making roles
2. Gender equity in work and working conditions
3. Terms and conditions of employment and policies
4. Career advancement and training for women
5. Being organized through women's organizations and professional bodies
6. Women's portrayal and content generated for women

■ Nearly two thirds of the respondents called for the introduction of gender policies to media institutions to promote equity in the workplace, and where it exists, to further strengthen those policies. 43% of the respondents were men, and half of them felt there was no need to introduce policies or institutional practices as women have already achieved gender equality in the newsrooms.

■ 80% of the respondents, over half of them women, considered women should not become mere members in media organizations but it was necessary to form an exclusive trade union for women media workers to address many issues that remain unaddressed.

■ Women also felt unions were focused on popular issues such as threats, arrests and assaults of journalists with no focus on policy and specially, issues concerning gender.

■ There was overwhelming support, with nearly 82% supporting the call to introduce national policy¹ that could support the advancement of women through specific focus on gender.

■ The large majority of media houses lacked institutional mechanisms such as gender committees and complaint cells, but had senior staff members assigned to include gender coverage.

■ Over 50% of the respondents felt there was adequate women's representation in the media houses, but despite a few high-flying women media executives, majority of the women held low-ranking positions, with limited ability to influence context. This was best explained in their inability to beat the stereotypical portrayal of women as family figures and victims.

■ The majority of respondents, over 80%, could not quantify the level of female representation in the media houses.

■ The highest level of equity was discovered in the distribution of beats with the majority of women respondents, nearly 70%, agreeing that they were able to select their rounds, including equal opportunities for covering subjects such as conflict, finance, commerce and politics.

¹ A National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022) already exists, but is almost unknown also among women NGO's and activists.

■ Despite women journalists having near-equal opportunities in undertaking assignments that are considered ‘hard,’ a majority of women journalists’ careers appeared to end with marriage and/or childbirth. The majority the respondents – 79%– agreed that re-entry after childbirth was difficult for women journalists.

■ While there appeared to be a level of gender sensitivity among decision makers in the Yangon-based media industry, this did not appear to be always the case, where some institutions did not prioritize gender or was promoting gender stereotypes due to market interest.

■ The portrayal of women in the media appeared to reinforce stereotypes, even when women were in charge of content generation. The content appeared to often promote the concept of women as family figures/homemakers or as victims, thus reinforcing women’s traditional roles and stereotypes, while failing to capture the diverse roles they play and are able to play in the evolving Myanmar society.

■ Less than 13% of the respondents had received gender training, according to the findings, while only 8% of the journalists said they have received safety training.

■ Over 82% of the journalists stated, they entered the field due to their love of journalism.

■ The large majority of respondents, 74% of them, were from the age group of 36-45 years of age.

■ Over 66% of the journalists said they were earning less than 100 US\$ a month while only 9% of the respondents said they earned 200-400 US\$, indicating the poor pay structures within media organizations.

■ A vast majority of respondents, 94%, claimed they have never experienced sexual harassment in their workplaces, though some mentioned having experienced harassment of a non-sexual kind. Senior women journalists attending the women’s focus group discussion did not agree on this view.

■ Myanmar’s media industry reflects similar global trends to the extent that women are strongly represented in newsrooms in terms of numbers but media institutions remain significantly male-dominated at the decision-making level.

■ In media organizations where women do have a strong say and are included in decision-making mechanisms, those decisions appeared to be more relevant to beats that are generally considered ‘soft’ or sections/segments that are dedicated to women readers/audiences.

■ The in-depth interviews indicated better newsroom diversity and a promising level of gender focus, though the two focus group discussions did not reflect the same view. Women participants at the discussions expressed keenness to advance their careers, including undergoing training, in addition to a strong wish to go beyond loose networks to building strong organizations that are led by women.

■ There was overwhelming support for the introduction of a national gender policy and institutional practices that would reflect the same. Both men and women considered regular and systematic media monitoring and analysis of gender representation in the media was vital for Myanmar media and felt there should be gender training for both men and women, but including more men to foster gender-sensitive newsrooms.

■ There was a strong need for training in safety and ethical journalism. There was general agreement that ethics were regularly violated due to lack of knowledge, exposing journalists to various problems including litigation.

■ There was a broad support voiced by participants for this study for targeted advocacy to media owners to support post-childbirth re-entry for women; incorporation of gender in journalism curricula of universities and other media training institutes; consistent and targeted awareness creation on the rights of women journalists including entitlements; introduction of mechanisms within media organizations to deal with complaints and redress; and finally, the creation of in-house gender committees.

■ Women journalists have also called for support to ensure equal representation for women in media organizations and unions and specially, to form an exclusive trade union for women media workers in Myanmar.

COUNTRY PROFILE IN BRIEF

Myanmar’s unexpected transition since 2010 has been rapid in pace and scope. Since then Myanmar has witnessed extraordinary change to promote democratic change, institutional reform, economic growth, and a peaceful transition. With that said this process is far from complete.

Following the 2010 elections, the new government that is nominally civilian includes many senior military officers who resigned their military posts for public office. This contentious parliament currently is comprised of 25% of its seats held by officers military, and another half of the current seats held by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) raises continual question about the scope and intent of the unprecedented reform process.

Nevertheless an astonishing degree of change has been initiated seen by the removal or suspension of laws that denied freedoms of speech, association, and movement revoked. Almost all of political prisoners have been released and political exiles have begun to return, which marks an important turn in Myanmar media development.

Earlier known as Burma, Myanmar was a British protectorate until 1937, the year in which it became a self-ruled colony, finally gaining complete political independence in 1948. Its chequered political history is marked by consistent political unrest against military rule.

GENDER PROFILE IN BRIEF

Myanmar is home to one of the world’s most famous former political prisoners, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was released when the country’s on-going process of political transition commenced².

However, her political status and the level of political participation hardly reflects the Myanmar society which is deeply conservative, with the status and role of women shaped by patriarchy, religion, ethnicity and sometimes, even the location.

Women’s contribution to the Myanmar economy

2 http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr14_statisticaltables.xls.

3 http://www.indexmundi.com/burma/demographics_profile.html.

4 <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar/overview#1>

5 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11749661>

6 <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MMR.html>

7 <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MMR.html>

8 <http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2388.htm>



Photo: Staffan Scherz

Myanmar is ranked 150 out of 187 countries in the 2014 Human Development Index (HDI)². It has over 100 ethnic groups and an estimated population of approximately 53 million out of which women form 52% of the population³. Based on the preliminary population figure of 51.4 million from the national census conducted in March/April 2014, the country’s per capita GDP is around \$1,105, one of the lowest in East Asia and the Pacific⁴.

remains low, although female participation in the labour market is 85.7%, compared to 82.9% of men. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) in 2013 ranked Myanmar 83 out of 149 countries surveyed⁷. The GII also records that 18.0% of adult women have reached at least the secondary level of education compared to 17.6% of their male counterparts⁷.

As stated the 2008 Constitution guarantees 25% of seats in the legislature - including some key ministerial positions - to all-male military representation and the remaining are seats predominantly filled by men.

The 2008 Constitution neither mention any benchmarks for women’s representation in government and even reserves some positions to men only; further limiting the participation of women in political life. Women, representing 5.59% of the legislature, hold currently 24 seats⁸.

In 2009, there were no female members of State Peace and Development Council, the Cabinet or the Supreme

Court. The new government has two female ministers and both Upper and Lower houses now include 53 female members⁹, ¹⁰. Women have been consistently calling for a quota system to enhance their political participation¹¹.

Violence against women, particularly sexual violence in the context of armed conflict, has been reported as being widespread and systematic in Myanmar, an aspect of the Burmese society that had been documented by various organizations¹². Myanmar's gender inequality is further fuelled by a number of discriminatory customary laws concerning marriage, property ownership and inheritance rights¹³. These laws often serve to reinforce stereotypes of women as child-bearers, while projecting men as unquestioned decision-makers, both at home and outside.

Although there is no hard data, non-government organizations report that women suffer high levels of violence committed by family members, the community and particularly by the State, exacerbated by armed conflict and displacement¹⁴. Although Myanmar ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1997 women continue to experience difficulties in being able to advocate or openly comment on government policy and drive change towards a gender-equal Myanmar. Despite several organizations having come to the fore and are undertaking researches, capacity building and advocacy work to achieve this developmental goal.

At present, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is leading reforms to enhance gender equality and empowerment¹⁶ in collaboration with other government agencies, civil society, academia and the international community¹⁷.

INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

Myanmar's media industry currently reflects some of the broader changes taking place in the country, including the changing role of women. The print, broadcast and online media have suffered strict censorship following the 1962 military coup and Myanmar's freedom of speech and press have suffered long years of control.

Following the political changes that began taking place in Myanmar, in August 2012, the new government abolished pre-publication censorship¹⁸ and issued new

'daily' licences¹⁹ to local publications²⁰. It also extended visas for international journalists²¹ up to three months and passed a new media law²² in early 2014.

Being a country with a large number of exiled journalists, the return of the exiled journalists since 2012 has been identified as a strong indicator of positive changes taking place in the country's media landscape²⁴. Media actors Mizzima, Irrawaddy and the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), having operated from overseas for many years, have established bureaux inside Myanmar since then, and appear keen to have a strong local presence and to practice journalism from their home base.

In 2014, the World Press Freedom Index of the Paris-based Reporters without Borders ranked Myanmar 145th out of 178 countries assessed, with the ranking reflecting an improved status, following the changes introduced to the media sector.

Nevertheless, the media industry in Myanmar continues to face serious challenges as it struggles to re-emerge after long years of media suppression by its military rulers and media practices that had affected professional journalism. There had been the use of non-media laws to arrest journalists and Myanmar's hard-line approach in handling journalists continues to cause much global concern²⁵.

Myanmar's weak education system and the lack of

9 <https://www.dvb.no/news/burmese-military-appoints-two-women-mps-burma-myanmar/36006>

10 <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/women-01142014143827.html>

11 <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/think-tank-calls-quota-boost-womens-role-burmese-politics.html>

12 <http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=329ref>

13 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/24/burma-scrap-proposed-discriminatory-marriage-law>

14 <http://www.nobelwomensinitiative.org/wp-content/archive/stories/burma.pdf>

15 http://globaljusticecenter.net/index.php?option=com_mtree&task=att_download&link_id=103&cf_id=3

16 <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burma-launches-national-plan-empower-women.html>

17 <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/09/19/Myanmar-Gender-Equality-and-Development>

18 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19315806>

19 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-04/01/c_132276352.htm

20 <http://www.cpj.org/2012/08/-bangkok-august-20-2012--burma.php>

21 <http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2013/02/13/myanmar-offers-3-month-visas-to-journalists/>

22 <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/visas-02142014153716.html>

23 <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/media-03052014163116.html>

24 <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2013/06/an-uneasy-homecoming-for-burmas-exile-media.php>

25 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/03/burma-repression-marks-press-freedom-day>



Gender issues on the table; focus group discussion at Myanmar Journalism Institute. Photo: Agneta Söderberg Jacobsson

strong and independent public institutions is a result of the oppressive tactics of the previous military regime. The strategy included strict censorship and it has left its indelible mark. The weakened media industry is considered a by-product of the same, impacted by serious capacity and ethical issues.

Despite the changes taking place at present, there is concern about the use of various out-dated laws in response²⁶ to what the government considers poor journalism. The imprisonment of four journalists, commonly referred to as the Unity case²⁷, highlights the capacity concerns that need to be addressed as a top priority in the development of a robust and independent media in Myanmar.

According to government records, there are today 2,000 accredited journalists in Myanmar. 60% of them are women. Despite several women at decision-making level, there are only a few publications that actually have women taking critical newsroom decisions.

26 https://www.ifex.org/burma/2014/07/15/unity_journal_protests/

27 <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2014/07/30/Myanmar-chemical-weapons-Unity-Journal-case.aspx?COLLCC=966024244&>

METHODOLOGY

Initial desk studies were conducted for purposes of pre-research to obtain a relevant level of understanding of Myanmar's media industry, and in particular, its application of gender and diversity standards.

Based on desk research, a questionnaire was developed to obtain a baseline overview of the media landscape from a gender and diversity perspective in the Myanmar media.

The entire research effort included 148 respondents, including 121 survey respondents, in total 69 women and 52 men. That makes 43% of male and 57% of female survey respondents. Ten in-depth interviews with senior editors/media managers and key representatives of media organizations were conducted in Yangon. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and for over one and a half hours, covering all seven aspects covered by the survey questionnaire.

To ensure data comparability, the study used a standardized, structured questionnaire, focused on six key areas. In addition to assessing Myanmar media's current status, the survey was designed for the purpose of assessing the needs for the promotion of a gender equal media.

Interview Kyaw Zaw Moe

Irrawaddy – Making room for gender and diversity

When Myanmar's news media was under the jackboot of a military regime, the inner story of a country in turmoil was largely revealed to the world by its exiled journalist community and international human rights organizations.

The Irrawaddy magazine, among the most popular of the exiled media, was published from Thailand for years. Now operating from Yangon, its English Edition editor, Kyaw Zwa Moe, continues to play a key role in highlighting the untold story of Myanmar.

Irrawaddy was founded in 1993 and Kyaw Zwa Moe has been a part of it since 2001, now counting 15 years with the magazine. He had been in exile for 13 of those 15 years and blacklisted by the military regime.

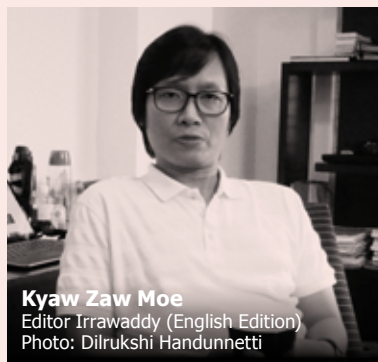
"I was able to visit my country for the first time in 2012 and opened a small office with about 10 people thereafter. In 2013, I returned and now we are Yangon-based," says Kyaw Zwa Moe.

According to him, there are many fears among journalists still and the new government is not yet comfortable with critical voices.

"Things are much better and we are happy to be allowed to return home. Yet, the government does not like it when we write about Buddhist mobs unleashing violence against the Muslim minority or analyze the Rohingya issue. There are visa restrictions on foreign correspondents still. But hope is not lost and that's good," he added.

Nearly half a century of being disadvantaged due to socio-economic conditions, coupled with military rule and violence, the absence of

strong public institutions and a deficit in democracy have all contributed to make Myanmar a battered country, Kyaw Zwa Moe remarks. The importance of independent and professional journalism in such a context is the reason for his return to Myanmar.



To make that happen, Kyaw Zwa Moe points out the importance of many perspectives in the newsroom: "Those perspectives become possible when a newsroom is diverse and diversity is possible when people come from different backgrounds, gender and age groups to constitute an editorial team", he said.

At Irrawaddy, eight out of fifteen journalists working for the English language magazine are women, and more than half of the Burmese language team are women. The Irrawaddy has its own women's section and according to Zwa Moe himself there is an avid interest in this section.

When there were communal clashes between Buddhists and Muslim in Mandalay, Irrawaddy's reporting on the incidents proved perceptive and moving. "Our reporter there is a woman. When tension eased, she was harassed while trying to interview people. We asked her to compile a reporter's diary from the field. This drew an amazing response from the readers."

The magazine is also dedicating space to mainstreaming gender and LGBT issues, topics that are considered controversial and culturally inappropriate in conservative Myanmar and he has found that readers are receptive to such stories.

"Gay people are discriminated against in Myanmar so we stay focused on such issues. We encourage women to do hard news reporting and to report from conflict areas. Some volunteer to go on assignment and some don't want to go, but we offer the opportunity to both men and women."

Kyaw Zwa Moe points at how difficult it is to push for equality in a military-driven country that naturally supports male dominance and is traditionally run by men. As for the obstacles women face in their media careers, he says the absence of a well-structured media industry has resulted in the absence of mechanisms that could encourage women journalists.

"In the 1990s, when Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, the only party to have been historically led by a woman, won the election, 87% of 27 million people voted for her which means, Burmese people can accept female leadership. The issue is then, why this example of support and acceptance is not replicated elsewhere?"

The surveys – containing 78 questions, both qualitative and quantitative – were distributed during a period of three months, September to November 2014.

The first phase of the survey, from September to November, was limited to Yangon. During the second phase, questionnaires were distributed in identified locations in Mandalay, Mon, Karen, Bago and Magay, deriving responses from 31 respondents, ¼ of the total number of respondents (121).

The survey respondents included 90 Yangon-based journalists, 68 women and 22 men. This reflects the country as a whole with the media industry being largely Yangon-centred.

From Mandalay, there were eight male respondents, from Mon, a total of 11 respondents including one woman, eight male respondents from Karan State, and another three male respondents from Bago and one male respondent from Magay. The number of respondents from the regions included only one woman and therefore not highly representative of gender diversity in perspectives.

The findings from this process are not sufficient to produce a clear picture of the nation as a whole, but can be used to suggest national trends. A subsequent follow-up, with a stronger emphasis on the areas outside Yangon, will be carried out during 2015.

The original questionnaire developed in English was translated into Burmese, the local language that is widely used in Myanmar. The questionnaire was distributed among both women and men of different age groups, religious and ethnic backgrounds and the media houses they represented were also of different sizes and foci.

The survey questionnaire, designed in line with UNESCO's *Gender Sensitive Indicators for the Media*²⁸ that promote gender equality within media organizations and gender portrayal in media content.

Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also held in Yangon to discuss the six assessment areas covered by the questionnaire.

The first, with women media practitioners was held on 21 September 2014 at the Myanmar Media Library (MML), attended by seven women journalists, both junior and senior and representing print, broadcast and online media.

The second FGD was held on 23 September 2014 at the Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJI), attended by a mixed group of 10 news reporters and feature writers/producers representing print, broadcast and online media.

The research team completed the three research activities in Yangon, from 16-26 September, 2014.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The survey was designed to derive responses to the following key research questions:

1. What is the gender representation in the Myanmar media industry? Trends and recent changes?
2. To what extent are women present in decision-making positions in the media industry?
3. How is gender reflected in media houses' guidelines and editorial policies? (Are they in anyway linked to national policy/priorities?)
4. How is ethnic diversity reflected in media reflected in media houses' guidelines and editorial policies? (Are they in anyway linked to national policy/priorities?)
5. What obstacles do women face in their media careers? How do they overcome them?

The areas covered by the survey are:

1. Women's representation in media houses, including women in decision making roles
2. Gender equity in work and working conditions
3. Terms and conditions of employment and policies
4. Training and career advancement for women journalists
5. Women's organizations and professional bodies
6. Women's portrayal and content generated for women

The entire study is based on:

1. Key survey findings
2. Ten in-depth interviews with senior journalists and heads of media organizations, both women and men
3. Responses of 17 journalists derived at two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

²⁸ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/crosscutting-priorities/gender-and-media/gender-sensitive-indicators-in-media/>



Reporters from Burma News International (BNI) prepare for news broadcasting in minority languages. Photo: Petra Quiding

DEMOGRAPHY OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 71% belonged to the 26-35 age group, a reflection of both young and mid-career journalists participating in the survey. 15% of respondents belonged to 18-25 years group and another 8% were from 46-55 years age group. Only 5% of respondents were above 55 years of age.

The majority of the respondents, 84% of the identified themselves as Buddhist while eight identified as belonging to minority communities/faiths. 9% refused to identify themselves by their ethnic group or their faith.

The demographics also showed that more women have received higher education, with 26% female respondents holding graduate qualifications against 19% male respondents. 9% women had additional qualifications including postgraduate qualifications while 7% had professional qualifications linked to journalism.

20% of respondents only had their secondary school certificate.

43% of the women respondents said they entered the media industry owing to their love of journalism and

marked the ability to influence change/call the powerful to account as the second reason. Men also showed a similar tendency, with 35% of men said they were driven by a passion for their craft, followed by a desire to influence change/call the powerful to account, indicating that at entry level, both men and women had identical reasons for entering the field.

51% of the respondents represented print media and 26% was working in television. About 8% were involved in online journalism while just as many were involved in agency reporting and other media work.

A total 60% of respondents, of which 29% were women and 71% men, said their families was being supportive. However, 19% women claimed their families had a negative reaction towards their career choice while 11% claimed the families remained neutral.

What motivated you to join the profession	Love of journalism	Make a difference	Other	Total
Male	42	08	2	52
Female	52	14	3	69
Total	94	22	5	121

KEY FINDINGS

Women's representation, including women in decision-making roles

The Yangon-based media industry indicated a strong female representation, in terms of numbers. 54% of the respondents felt there was adequate women's representation in the media houses, but despite a few high-flying women media executives, majority of the women held low-ranking positions, with limited ability to influence context. This was best explained in their inability to beat the stereotypical portrayal of women as family figures and victim.

The survey showed that women are mostly found in low and mid level positions in the media industry, mostly working as lifestyle reporters, feature writers television anchors, announcers and desk editors.

Those who have reached higher positions were working either for the English media or, had their own family connections to the management.

What percentage of senior editorial roles is held by women in your media organization? (Director, Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Executive Producer, Bureau Chief and similar title)	Male	Female	Total
Less than 10%	-	3	3
10-25%	1	1	2
25-50% (mid-level)	41	24	65
Don't know	10	24	51
Grand Total	52	69	121

There were no media house owners except Ma Thida, Executive Editor of Myanmar Independent was also identified as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who decided to go on record.

42% of the respondent could not quantify the level of female representation in the media houses. Many respondents justified their response by saying they did not know such details.

The majority of respondents held full-time regular jobs (71%). Respondents also included 17% freelance journalists. Another 12% were on contracts.

20% of the respondents (of which 75% were men and 25% women) were holding senior positions while the majority of respondents, 56%, were holding mid-level positions.

There appeared to be some level of gender sensitivity among decision makers in the Yangon-based media industry. Some of the institutions demonstrated a conscious effort to increase female representation; equitable distributions of beat and provide space/airtime for gender and diversity, including ethnic issues.

Gender equity in work and working conditions

The highest level of equity was discovered in the distribution of areas of coverage, commonly referred to as beats. The majority of women respondents agreed that they were able to select their beats, including equal opportunities for covering areas such as conflict, finance, human rights, commerce and politics.

While 72% of the women said they could select their beats, another 16% said, they could not. 12% of the female respondents said, it was possible to some extent. Men also felt they could choose beats/rounds, with 77% saying it was possible, while 10% said it was not possible. 13% of the male respondents said it could be done to some extent.

Have you been given the opportunity to select beats?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	40	50	90
To some extent	07	08	15
No	05	11	16
Total	52	69	121

Predictably, there were 71% of the women journalist whose beats included gender while only 4% of the men said they have contributed to gender coverage. The top five areas covered by women were: Lifestyle and gender (77%) human rights (55%) education (54%), conflict (52%) child rights (51%). Women went almost missing in science and technology reporting as well as sports. None of the survey participants in the survey were columnists/analysts, considered a serious male preserve.

Interview Eaint Khaing Oo

Taking shape – First ever Women Journalists’ Network

A freelance journalist with the Voice of America (VOA) and a journalism trainer, Eaint Khaing Oo was arrested six years ago, for playing the role of concerned citizen while reporting news.

In 2008, when the devastating Nargis cyclone hit Myanmar, she was working in Yangon, reporting in areas where Chinese migrants were settled, many of which had their livelihood destroyed. When Khaing Oo tried to help the victims by sending them to UNDP and ICRC offices she got arrested. She disregarded the military declaration that said that there were no internationally displaced people because of Nargis.

She was sentenced to two years and Khaing Oo is now lucky to be free to practise her craft. Currently she works for Yangon Press International, an online publication, as a senior reporter.

“We have many women working with us. My feeling is that women get to choose their beats to a lesser extent than men. When women are assigned, they just do it. Sometimes we don’t know what our interests are, so editors often tend to decide,” Khaing Oo said.

She finds the laws that prevail in Myanmar oppressive and restrictive to women. The various laws, very restrictive in practice, place women in a lower position than men. At present, efforts are being made to propose legal reforms.

“According to one law, when a woman is raped, the perpetrator can compensate the victim’s family by offering a cow. Cows are expensive and this is considered sufficient compensation. So you can rape a woman and offer a cow in return!”

She adds: “Laws are also written by men and this is why women find highly objectionable provisions contained in these laws. A group has petitioned the parliament with regard to this archaic piece of law, what we call the Cow Law, that denies justice. The legal system push women down, so naturally, the



newsrooms reflect these deep-rooted biases that immediately make women subservient to men,” said Khaing Oo.

Media owners also prefer to have men at leadership level.

“They don’t encourage women even when they are good. They don’t promote women despite their ability. Even where women are appointed to decision-making roles, the actual decisions are mostly taken by men. Sadly, women also end up accepting this.”

Even when there are competent men and women, generally the job is offered to the man, because male superiority is deeply ingrained in the Burmese culture.

Khaing Oo claims that the lack of insurance coverage and transport for female journalists are problems caused by the absence of systems: “Women only get one month of paid maternity leave. When pregnant, women give up their work. When children are big, some of them return. By that time, it is often difficult for women to re-enter.”

The first ever Women Journalists’ Network in Myanmar, she says, is beginning to take shape, in the form of a FaceBook page. For Khaing Oo, it is a start and a platform for sharing ideas. It has potential but it will take some time, she insisted.

“At the time I entered the industry, we had no training opportunities. The country was closed and opportunities were limited. It was about maintaining a low profile to stay safe. Now there are conflict-sensitive reporting and ethical reporting initiatives in Myanmar. Almost equal opportunities now exist for women to get trained. I attended a safety training programme in Thailand, delivered by a male trainer,” Khaing Oo said.

Khaing Oo’s biggest criticism of women journalists is their own contribution to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. “Women are portrayed as successful only if they are celebrities or married to rich people. Of course there is Aung Sang Su Kyi and she is page one news but beyond that, success is determined differently. Success is measured by a woman’s ability to handle her home well. Women are never really experts or have their opinions valued.”

“If there is gender balance at the decision-making level and men also respect women’s rights newsrooms will have a better working environment.”

Myanmar’s media industry shows that women are strongly represented in newsrooms in terms of numbers but media institutions remain significantly male-dominated at decision-making level.

In media organizations where women do have a strong say and are included in decision-making mechanisms, the decisions appear to be more relevant to beats that are generally considered ‘soft’ or sections/segments that are dedicated for women readers/ audiences.

There was general consensus that women’s influence on content was minimal, even in institutions where women were in large numbers or found themselves in decision-making positions. On the other hand, there were media organizations such as the Yangon Group and Mizzima Media group, though different in approach, contributing towards mainstreaming gender and diversity.

The restrictions were reflected when respondents sought to analyse their ability to decide on the content they generated. While 23 men said they always could determine the content they generated, only 12 women said the same. When 18 men said they could do so most of the time, only 10 women gave the same response. 15 men and 11 women respectively said they could do so to some extent. While two men said they could never influence content, four women said the same. Two men and three women said the question was inapplicable.

Are you able to determine the content of your own work?	Male	Female
Always	23	12
Most of the time	18	10
To some extent	15	11
Never	2	4
Not applicable	2	3
Total	60	40

Some of the women journalists who attended the focus group discussion for women said pages dedicated to gender or for topics on women were ‘women’s preserve’. Many of the expressed reluctance to share that space with male journalists, claiming their decision-making clout was confined to those pages and therefore, they did not wish to allow any encroachment by men.

“We would protect these pages because that’s all we got,” one discussion participant said, justifying the way most women protected their small sphere of influence.

A good indicator of equity is remuneration and benefits. A significant number of women respondents, 67% of the women who answered the survey, said they did not receive equal pay for equal work. A few women, seen in all, indicated that men received higher salaries for the same type of work.

During the women’s focus group discussion, three women specifically mentioned being gender-discriminated with regard to remuneration due to a ‘deep seated bias’ against women employees. One participant said it was socially accepted to have men paid more for the same amount of work and there was a belief that men were better employees than women.

A woman participant from the mixed group of journalists also mentioned that women were paid less than men for the same amount of work.

69% of the journalists, both male and female, said they were earning less than 100 US\$ a month while only 9% of the respondents said they earned 200-400 US\$, indicating the poor pay structures that existed within the media organizations.

Nearly 66% respondents called for the introduction of gender policies to media institutions to promote equity in the workplace, and where it exists, to further strengthen those policies. However, about half of the male respondents felt there was no need to introduce national policies or institutional policies and/or practices as women have already achieved gender equality in the newsrooms.

As measures that could help ensure gender diversity and gender equity in newsrooms, 44% of the women thought there should be more gender-sensitive men in media institutions at all levels while 49% of the men thought it important to have more women-friendly employment policies and practices.

27% of the women considered it was important to have more women at the decision-making level while 26% of the men also endorsed the view.



Photo: Staffan Scherz

What strategies could make a difference to gender equity issues such as portrayal of women, career advancement etc?

	Male	Female	Total
Having more women journalists at all levels	11	07	18
Having gender sensitive men in the media at every level	29	04	33
Having more women at the decision-making level	18	11	29
Women-friendly employment policies and practices	08	21	29
Total	66	43	109

Terms and conditions of employment and policies

Many of the respondents, 71%, said they were entitled to a number of benefits, including annual leave, medical leave, maternity and paternity leave.

Only 4% of the respondents mentioned they were entitled to a travel allowance while only 13% mentioned that they were entitled to annual pay increases.

The three key leave entitlements mentioned by the respondents were: medical leave (48%), annual leave (39%) and casual leave (38%).

30 women and 28 men mentioned maternity and paternity leave being available. The latter is considered one of the most progressive labour measures taken in the recent past.

In response to health, life and accident insurances, 30 respondents, both male and female, answered in the negative, while others left it blank.

When it came to listing out available facilities, a majority of the respondents, both men and women, mentioned they had separate toilets. About half of the female respondents mentioned they got transport after working late hours.

Women who attended the focus group discussion felt the scope of the media organizations had to be further increased to include labour issues, as in other countries. Three participants stressed on the need to go beyond

journalists’ safety issues including arrests – though a serious concern in Myanmar – and for media organizations to clamour for improved working conditions and equity in the workplace.

What facilities are currently available to you in your workplace?
(Select all that apply)

	Separate toilets for women and men	Child care room	Prayer facilities	Transport after late shifts	Security
Male	25	-	-	05	03
Female	36	-	-	28	08
Total	61	-	-	33	11

30% of the respondents, in assessment of their satisfaction with the working conditions, said they were working with difficulties but the positive attributes of journalism made them stay on. Another 17% respondents said their workplace was satisfactory though improvements can be made while another 16% mentioned their work being rewarding. 9% respondents mentioned they were unappreciated by the employer while three others said it was their only source of income.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for Myanmar’s women journalists was the restricted opportunity for women journalists to re-enter the field after childbirth. A majority of respondents – 72% of both men and women – agreed that re-entry after childbirth was difficult for women journalists.

‘That’s normal,’ said one of the male participants at the mixed group focus group discussion, insisting that it was natural for a Burmese family to require women to dedicate their time to raising children and to remain home-focused, after childbirth.

How would you describe the leave and re-entry for women after childbirth in your organization?

	Male	Female	Total
Very good	-	-	-
Good	2	11	13
Acceptable	4	3	7
Poor	21	66	87
Non existent	-	1	1
Unable to answer	-	-	-
Total	27	81	108



Photo: Staffan Scherz

Among the key aspects that could make women journalists comfortable in a workplace is the absence of sexual harassment and mechanisms that demonstrate an institution’s commitment to the same.

Majority of the respondents, 94%, claimed they have never experienced sexual harassment in their workplaces, though some of them mentioned having experienced harassment of a non-sexual kind. This view was disputed by the senior women journalists who attended the FGD, who claimed that young women often did not understand the concept of sexual harassment and that it was not only physical harassment that should be looked at.

Except for 9% of the respondents, others did not mention the availability of complaints cells or gender committees within their respective media organizations.

The majority of media houses appeared to lack institutional mechanisms such as gender committees and complaint cells, but had senior women staff members assigned to oversee space and airtime dedicated for gender/women’s issues.

However, some of the media owners during individual interviews expressed their keenness to introduce in house mechanisms that would create a better working environment for women, which augurs well for the Myanmar mass media.

Career advancement opportunities and training

Survey results indicated that international media organizations (INGOs) made the biggest contribution in terms of delivering journalism trainings (64%) followed by employers (42%). One of the new developments in the Myanmar media industry is the level of interest within media organizations to invest in the capacity building of their staff, sometimes as collaborative efforts with INGOs/media training institutions. Some organizations such as the Yangon Group mentioned having their own trainers while many said, they relied on external expertise, including foreign, for purposes of journalists’ training.

29 The training was of basic quality and mainly focus on gender sensitive language

Only 14% respondents mentioned not having received any training.

As training forms a significant component of the development of individual journalists as well as teams, there is considerable support towards building the capacities of journalists in Myanmar. It appears, through the survey findings, that both women and men enjoyed similar opportunities for training. Many of them have received training in news reporting, conflict sensitive reporting and business reporting.

Who offered you training?	Employer	Union	INGO	Other
Male	28	-	36	2
Female	23	-	42	1
Total	51		78	3

Despite Myanmar’s media beginning to focus on gender, training in gender does not appear to be a priority yet, as opposed to conflict sensitive reporting which participants during the two FDGs considered very important and mentioned as being available on a regular basis.

Participants at the FDGs also felt that such training would have an immediate positive outcome – improved working relationship between male and female employees as well better understanding of the constraints faced by women journalists.

Survey findings also showed that, despite the level of training currently on offer to journalists from Myanmar, less than 21% of the participants that answered the question have received gender training²⁹, while only 10 journalists said they have received safety training, including one woman.

One of the participants at the women’s FGD said the term ‘safety training’ was completely alien to her and did not know what such training entailed.

70% of the respondents from the regions, excluding Yangon, where 74% of the respondents were based, said they have received some kind of training, including one who had gender training and another who had safety training.

Interview Ma Thinda

“To find your own space you have to be enabled”

It had been no easy journey for Ma Thida, Executive Editor of Echo and the Myanmar Independent News Journals. She began as a medical doctor who opted for serious journalism with the hope of influencing her country’s democracy agenda.

Ma Thida has been associated with Myanmar’s iconic rights champion and democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and has remained part of Myanmar’s democratic struggle, facing arrests and assault. Now that Myanmar is in democratic transition, she is keen to make her own contribution towards fostering independent journalism in Myanmar.

Among her cherished goals is to encourage women to make their own contribution to the evolution of the media industry, which she feels will take both time and effort. “They will have to gradually find their own space and exert influence, but to do that, first they must be enabled.”

Ma Thida says: “Women in this country have remained passive for too long. Dictatorships and wars are male creations. The residual impacts are felt by every sphere, including journalism. In numbers, women dominate the industry but they often don’t decide on content, thus reducing their impact on the industry. While they may play decisive roles in the alternate media, their footprint in the mainstream is small.”

For her, Myanmar’s lack of media literacy is a serious concern and contributes to the low standard of professional media. “Journalists do not have exposure to the actual newsroom experience. We have been doing propaganda for years,

calling it journalism. Myanmar never had the tradition of news journalism. Instead, there were publications with heavy doses of advocacy.”

She mentions that the education in journalism and training opportunities are inadequate and inappropriate.

“Yangon University offers a degree course but most university products are attracted to broadcasting rather than print.”



Ma Thida
Executive Editor of Echo and the Myanmar Independent News Journals.
Photo: Dilrukshi Handunnetti

Before she made her way into journalism she worked as a story writer. She recalls the serious changes that Myanmar underwent during the Socialist period. “We were allowed only leftist literature. The authorities could not appreciate true forms of literature. Readers ended up consuming propaganda material.”

Authoritarianism had destroyed the country’s public consciousness and people don’t feel encouraged to freely express themselves, re-

sulting in poor literature and journalism.

Capacity concerns apart, the lack of independence of media owners also debilitate the industry, she says.

According to her, the registration of media institutions largely depended on the owners’ political clout while the absence of editorial policies resulted in owners heavily influencing the outlets. Those who have access to information in Myanmar are those with strong military links or those with political power, she stresses.

“Due to these relationships, despite her internationally acclaimed status, in most publications, Aung San Suu Kyi did not make it to page one,” she alleges.

Ma Thida insists that to date, the military establishment continues to play a huge role in making decisions for the country’s media, making the media biased, strongly influenced by the military agenda and indirectly controlled by them. There are several daughters of former generals who own media houses in Myanmar, she says.

In Myanmar, cross-ownership is prohibited but according to her, the army has ownership over radio, print and television, a popular ownership model.

“There is no official censorship but there is also no free press,” she insists.

According to her, the inclusion of the gender dimension can enhance the product’s quality. “Some mistake this as promotion of feminist ideologies. For me, it is an equity issue.”

“Admittedly, it is hard for women to reach the same position as men. Getting to the top can be truly difficult for women. Only a few women reach the top and that is mostly due to their investment and (military) family background.”

More than half of the male respondents agreed that such trainings could improve the working environment for both men and women. About as many men said they would like to participate in such trainings and to learn about the issue. The other half of the male respondents claimed there was no need for such training as women did enjoy equal rights.

There was strong support from women respondents, with 62% of them supportive of gender training as a contributor to an improved working environment while another 25% of them expressed interest in participating in such training.

Have you received gender training?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	04	11	15
No	28	35	63
Total	32	46	78

Another area where training has not taken place is safety, a critically important area for Myanmar where many journalists are involved in conflict coverage.

Safety training, which is yet to reach Myanmar the way conflict sensitive journalism has, appears to target more men than women. Only 12% of the respondents have received safety training, including one Yangon-based woman who is a trainer in gender. 60% of the respondents said they have never received safety training, of which 53% were men and 47% were women.

Have you received safety training?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	09	01	10
No	39	34	73
Total	48	35	83

Journalists who participated in the two FGDs mentioned that in terms of training, one of the missing aspects was refresher courses.

“We get to attend the various types of media training now available to journalists. But seniors who have put in about 10 years or more need to enhance their knowledge. We hardly find opportunities to attend refresher courses/trainings,” one FDG participant said.

As Myanmar’s media landscape undergoes significant changes, there are many aspects of training that could



Photo: Dilrukshi Handunnetti

“There are many issues we have not been able to touch due to the situation prevailing in the country. As things improve, we hope to change our focus and look into various other concerns for the journalists’ community here, including labour issues and the promotion of gender diversity in Myanmar media”

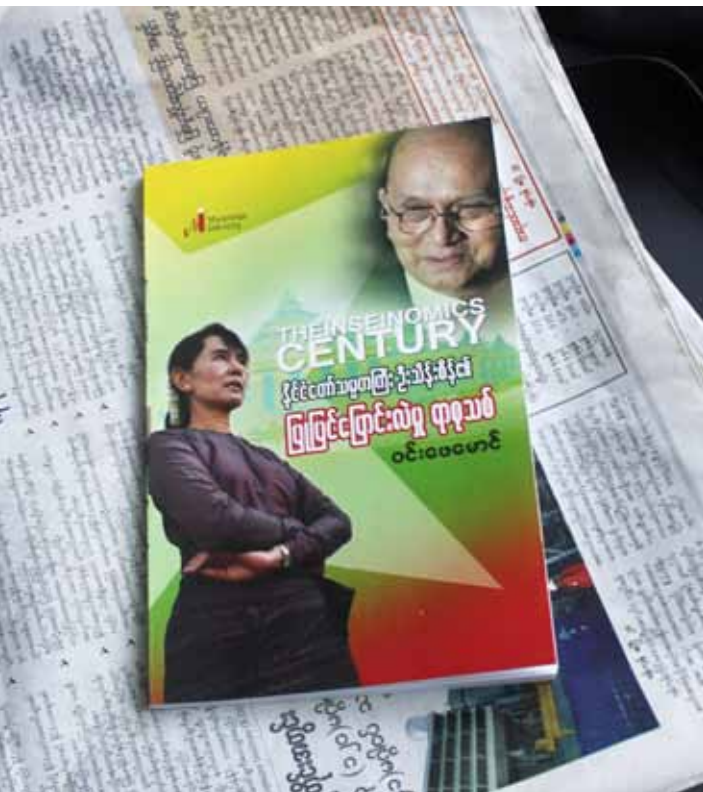
Myint Kyaw
Secretary General of Myanmar Journalism Network (MJN).

help increase the professionalism of practitioners, and such training should include both gender and safety training.

Being organized through women’s organizations and professional bodies

The strongest views towards gender equity and women’s leadership in the media were expressed by women respondents under this assessment area, where 80% of the respondents, of which half were men, said women should not become mere members in media organizations but should become catalysts for change.

The survey statistics showed three out of nine respondents who said they held membership with one of the newly formed media organizations in Myanmar were women. Out of 48 respondents who claimed to be non-members, 77% were women.



Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the NLD (National league for Democracy).
Photo: Agneta Söderberg Jacobsson

Are you a member of a media organization?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	6	3	09
No	11	37	48
Total	17	40	57

Only two women were either officials or office bearers in a national level media organization whereas four male participants answered in the affirmative. Both men and women reflected a shared sentiment during individual interviews and FGDs that women should not hold membership for the sake of being members, unless they could influence change.

Are you an official/ office bearer?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	4	02	6
National union/ organization	4	02	6
Neither	-	-	-
Total	8	4	12

13% of the respondents said there was enough representation for men in media organizations, including 7% of the responding women. 9% of the respondents said they do not know.

84% of the responding women supported the view that they should form an exclusive trade union for women media workers to address many issues that remain unaddressed. The media networks, which are all new in Myanmar, appeared to have some representation of women, though none of them appeared to reflect the inclusion of a gender and diversity agenda.

Women also felt unions were focused on popular issues such as threats, arrests and assaults of journalists with no focus on policy or issues concerning gender.

The in-depth interviews suggest that women may be included in media organizations only for tokenism. The lack of numbers also meant lack of visibility for women as well as the issues they would represent in the industry, women journalists at a FGD pointed out, having identified the absence of being professionally organized as a weakness that needed to be urgently addressed.

Strong voices call out for exclusive trade unions for women journalists in Myanmar to effectively strategize and ensure increased representation in media organizations

Does your organization have a gender policy?	Male	Female	Total
Don't know	15	11	26
No	07	02	09
Yes	-	-	-

Do you support quotas for women in media organizations?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	14	34	48
No	02	-	02
Total	16	34	50

Out of the 48 respondents who expressed support for quotas for women or proportional representation in organizational leadership, 34 were women while 14 were men. Only two men said no.

Also, 81% of the respondents supported the call to introduce a national policy that could support the advancement of women through the specific focus on gender.

Women’s portrayal and content generated for women

One of the most important but also the weakest areas of assessment was the combined area of Myanmar media’s portrayal of women (that appeared to reinforce stereotypes) and the content generated for women audiences that contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes.

Given that women had near full control over gender and women’s page in the print, it also seemed that women were contributing to the perpetuation of stereotypical portrayals.

Except for a few progressive publications, some of them without a strong gender focus and some with, the content generally appeared to promote the concept of women as family figures/homemakers or as victims, reinforcing women’s traditional roles in society, while failing to capture the diverse roles women already play and are able to play in the evolving Myanmar society.

The stereotypes, according to women who attended a FDG, consistently influence not just content but also the newsroom culture. Given that the female form appears to have a price tag, a senior woman journalist said it was impossible to convince male editors of the unsuitability of the random use of women’s photographs, portraying them often as sexual objects. “This practice is impossible to beat inside the newsroom,” a Yangon-based senior journalist who is now a freelance editor/ writer said.

This trend was further fuelled by the content generated for women, often by women themselves. The Myanmar media also has a strong focus on celebrities and gossip, further contributing the stereotypical portrayals, of both men and women.

According to the survey findings and interviews, there is extremely limited involvement of men in life-style or gender pages or television/radio programming, unless with the more technical aspects of programme production.



There are no heroic women in the Burmese society. There is only one heroine, and that’s Aung San Suu Kyi. No one seems to be interested in looking for prospective leaders among regular women.

FGD participant

The survey included a qualitative question that required respondents to analyse the depiction of women in the media and mark four top selections. According to respondents Myanmar women are largely portrayed as family figures (57%, of which 68% were men and 31% women) sexual objects (48%, of which 40% were men and 60% women), weak/timid (68%, of which half were men) and negative stereotypes (62%, of which 21% were men and 79% were women). Only 4% of respondents said women were depicted as experts/leaders.

In your opinion, how are women in mass media content are often depicted as: (Mark top 4)	Male	Female	Total Other
Family figures	47	22	69
Sexual objects	23	35	58
Experts/leaders	02	03	05
Negatively stereotyped	09	34	43
Weak and timid	24	23	47
Total	105	117	222

Respondents, mostly women, have called for policy measures that promote gender equity, including gender guidelines. 41 women respondents call for the enforcement of guidelines on gender equity while 19 men endorsed the same.

38 respondents called for gender sensitive male journalists and editors, including 24 women and 14 men.

Interview

Thin Thin Aung

“Women are a target audience”

Thin Thin Aung is a woman who considers herself a human rights activist and a feminist. A believer of ‘female energy’ and a woman’s ability to positively influence the world, Aung now plays the role of Consultant Editor on Gender and Diversity, in addition to being a Director of Mizzima Women’s Television and Executive Director of the Mizzima Media Group.

For Aung, gender and diversity are now her main areas of focus and she approaches them from an unrepentant ‘feminist point of view.’ She says that there are many gender issues in Myanmar, including violence against women, that keep women in a subjugated position.

When it comes to reporting on violence against women, Aung blames some of the media, for reinforcing gender stereotypes.

“The media also berates women for going out at night and for the clothes they wear. Instead of blaming women, they should encourage men to become disciplined and learn to respect women. Police sometimes go to the extent of offering advice on the type of clothes women should wear. Often, women are blamed for their choice of clothes instead of a man’s conduct,” Aung commented.

As a move to influence change in the media focus, Aung said, Mizzima dedicates airtime and newspaper space for issues linked to sexual orientation and ethnicity as well as gender and diversity; “We also discuss domestic violence and rape, two less discussed issues.”

“Myanmar has some 100 ethnic communities. We also have a lesbian and gay community. Myanmar hardly reports on lesbians, though there is some reportage on homosexuals. Many don’t want to be interviewed because of the stigma

that would soon follow after their sexual orientation is discussed.”

At Mizzima, there are flexible hours for employees. Women with young children are specially sup-



ported and there is paternity leave. Women are supported to return to work after childbirth and women are also facilitated to climb the ladder.

“Women have to work thrice as hard to prove their worth. When they get married, have children and housework, it becomes extremely difficult. I have seen some good women journalists staying at home, after marriage. This is such a shame that we do not appreciate the professional capacity of women.”

Among her biggest discoveries is the increasing popularity of gender-focused reporting. Likewise, Mizzima’s gender pages are also very popular. Readers wait for those

pages. External contributors are increasing by the day and prefer to contribute to those pages.

“We are happy to have pioneered strong women-focused pages.”

“The highest likes on our Facebook page are for gender programmes. Women are a market, a target audience and the industry must understand this dynamic.”

“There is also a false notion that gender is all about women. At Mizzima, we make it a matter for men too. If men understand gender, it will help create a better working atmosphere for everyone and to produce meaningful and gender-sensitive content.”

“We also have men working on gender and diversity. Though few are interested. That gives me a lot of hope,” she said.

Aung has a few things planned for Mizzima, and a top priority is the introduction of a gender policy for the entire media group. “We are a gender conscious organization and while men and women have a comfortable working set up, the policy can be a forward step and inspire others,” Aung said.

Aung argues for the creation of a strong Women Journalists union or an association that could take up issues on their behalf in the media industry. “How can they fight for their rights when the level of exploitation is high and there is no collective way to fight it?” Aung queried.

“The Myanmar Journalist Network includes both men and women. It is very active. But ultimately, it is best to have an exclusive media organization for women.”

49 women respondents supported the view that more women should be appointed as editors/programme managers, including 28 women 21 men, while 17 others, including 11 women and six men, called for more women at the decision-making level roles in their respective media houses.

What measures could promote gender equity in mass media content?	Male	Female	Total
More women journalists and editors	21	28	49
More gender-sensitive male journalists and editors	14	24	38
Enforcement of guidelines on gender equity	19	41	60
More women in decision-making roles in media	6	11	17
Total	104	60	164

ANALYSIS

Despite forming over 50% of the media practitioners, Myanmar women journalists are facing two main challenges within the industry – lack of opportunity to advance their careers and absence of institutional mechanisms supportive of women media workers.

Myanmar’s media industry reflects current global trends to the extent that women are strongly represented in newsrooms in terms of numbers, but media institutions remain significantly male dominated at the decision-making level.

The women journalists found themselves mostly in the low and mid level positions, while a few women had some responsibility with regard to planning of content and daily newsroom management while those with desk duties were involved in leisure/lifestyle/entertainment sections

In media organizations where women do have a strong say and are included in decision-making mechanisms, it appears that such decisions are more relevant to beats that are generally considered ‘soft’ or sections/segments that are dedicated for women readers/audiences. Except at two media organizations of two different sizes, women were not taking editorially significant decisions that would influence institutional policies and practices.



There is also a false notion that gender is all about women. If men understand gender, it will help create a better working atmosphere for everyone and to produce meaningful and gender-sensitive content.

Thin Thin Aung

Myanmar’s newsrooms have significant female representation but remain male-dominated, with decision-making often a male prerogative. Women are marginalized, in the presentation of content, in decision making, opportunities for career advancement as well as media organizations, all of which reflect in the absence of women’s perspectives oftentimes.

The highest level of equity was delivered in the distribution of beats, with the majority of women respondents agreeing that they were able to select their beats, including equal opportunities for covering beats such as conflict, human rights, finance, human right, commerce and politics. However, women went almost missing in science and technology reporting as well as sports. There were no columnists/analysts, generally a male preserve in Myanmar.

Among the key issues faced by Myanmar journalists are their low salaries, amongst the lowest in Asia, with many women required to accept lower salaries than men. The industry appears to have concerns about their employment contracts, conditions, institutional mechanisms and policies. Women journalists did, in certain aspects, face significant constraints. Most women journalists either downplayed their career post marriage/childbirth, largely due to family pressure/lack of support. Media houses too did not have institutional mechanisms

that facilitated women's re-entry into the field after childbirth.

Women participants at the discussions expressed keenness to advance their careers, including undergoing training, in addition to a strong wish to go beyond loose networks to building strong organizations that are led by women.

With women indicating the lack of sexual harassment in their workplaces, it appears that a vital condition to achieve gender equality is already found in the newsrooms. It also reflects certain positive cultural attributes that augurs well for the Myanmar media.

With increased opportunities for journalism training, Myanmar journalists have had access to considerable training in news reporting and specialized reporting, in the past three years. Majority of them have received journalism training from international NGOs and from the respective media houses, with both men and women having equal opportunities to undergo training.

Yet, missing in the training equations were safety and gender, two critically important areas of training for a transformative society like Myanmar.

The strongest views towards gender equity and women's leadership emerged when a large majority of women calling for a media association exclusively for women that could be developed into a trade union. At present, only a few women are associated with the existing organizations while fewer women hold positions in those organizations. The existing media organizations also appear to have their priorities cut out for them already, but gender is not one of them. Though all organizations had fair representation of women, they were not in the top leadership positions. None of the organizations had a gender policy.

As in every culture, Myanmar too has its own fixed images of both men and women, reinforcing gender stereotypes. The media reflects the same strong biases and continue to contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypical gender portrayals.

Adding to the restrictions are the lack of capacity and an understanding of concepts among journalists themselves, vital for the creation of a plural and inclusive media.

The fixed gender images, drawn from entrenched prejudices, pose challenges to journalists and to the media. They also contribute to the notion that women are weak, unable to make decisions or to undertake serious work, and therefore, unworthy of being promoted, of receiving equal pay for equal work and to be entitled to certain employment rights.

Myanmar media also showed reinforcement of gender stereotypes through content, often portraying women as family figures, sexual objects or as weak/timid persons, as reflected in the survey. Women made news as celebrities or wives of well-known men and hardly ever as experts and opinion makers. Ironically, women in media were responsible to a large extent for the stereotypical portrayal of women, as much of the content generated for female audiences were developed by women.

These issues are compounded by a patriarchal culture that accords women a lower position in society, creating additional barriers for women.

Equity and equality are important to both men and women and necessary for the betterment of any society. Discriminatory practices and prejudices need to be addressed through mechanisms that foster equity, enabling working environments and the introduction of professional journalism founded on sound ethics.

Women's voices can be a strong reflection of a transformative society, reflect societal values and offer a diversity of perspectives that would otherwise go missing in the media.

Respect for gender and balanced portrayals form an integral part of media ethics, as valuable as accuracy and fairness in reporting. Such values also contribute to increased media professionalism, in turn, contributing to the promotion of gender equity in the national context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Regular and systematic media monitoring and analysis of gender representation in the media
2. Gender training for both men and women, but including larger numbers of men to create more gender-sensitive newsrooms
3. Follow up on National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022)³⁰ to develop recommendations and activity plan related to media
4. Training in safety and ethical journalism
5. Targeting advocacy with media owners to support post-childbirth re-entry for women
6. Incorporation of gender in journalism curricula of universities and other media organizations, involved in media capacity building
7. Awareness creation on the rights of women journalists
8. Introduction of mechanisms within media organizations to deal with complaints and redresses, including gender committees
9. Promote equal representation for women in media organizations and unions
10. Assist efforts at networking and being organized, specially towards the formation of women-only trade union in Myanmar
11. Look deeper into gender representation in media content and form an action plan for how media can better mirror society in terms of actual representation
12. Foster/promote an understanding that gender equality issues are news issues and news worthy
13. Promote modernized image of journalist profession as a lifelong professional choice, suited for women as well as for men
14. Promote security measures so that women can take on challenging beats and assignments without restrictions
15. Promote gender awareness in media houses to avoid stereotype labour division in assigning beats and work tasks (for men as well as for women)
16. Support women media professionals to take on managerial positions in general as well as top positions in media industry
17. Promote gender equal salaries for men and women in media industry
18. Target women media professionals with technical training in different media platforms (as well as multiplatform training)
19. Provide expertise in media industry to help media practitioners (men as well as women) to handle traumas
20. Promote gender sensitive analysis of editorials/newsrooms to track gender discrimination that might be built into facilities

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