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*In partnership with: Somali
Women Journalists
Organization (SWJO)*

An assessment review of
SWJO-led gender
activities under the IMS
Somalia Programme
(2024–2025)

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1. Executive Summary

This assessment evaluates the impact and results of **Somali Women Journalists Organization (SWJO)** gender activities implemented under the International Media Support (IMS) SIDA programme (2024–2025). The programme aimed particularly to advance gender equality in Somali media content. It builds upon the foundational **Somali Gender Respect Declaration** developed by SWJO in 2016.

The assessment examines the combined effects of several key interventions. These included a **baseline study** in media content led by a gender expert. They also included a series of **nationwide regional workshops** on gender bias and inclusive reporting. The programme piloted the **Gender Tracking Tool (GTT)** to monitor women's representation in media content. It further supported SWJO's ongoing **policy advocacy efforts** within media institutions.

The assessment employed a qualitative design based on Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with journalists, editors, producers, and media managers across Mogadishu, Kismayo, Beletweyne, Dhuusamareeb, and Baidoa, complemented by document review and programme monitoring data.

Baseline evidence confirms that structural gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched within Somali media. Most media houses continue to operate without formal gender policies, dedicated budgets, or functional HR systems. Women remain significantly underrepresented in editorial leadership and in high-visibility reporting beats such as politics, security, and economics, while safety constraints and informal management practices further restrict their professional advancement.

In mid-2025, SWJO introduced the Gender Tracking Tool as a pilot mechanism to support systematic monitoring of gender representation in news content. Initial results from four media houses show that women's participation in hard-news sourcing remained close to zero percent at the time of measurement,

underscoring the scale of structural exclusion and the need for sustained corrective interventions.

Despite these constraints, the assessment identifies a clear and consistent rise in gender awareness among male and female journalists, editors, and producers. Gender considerations are increasingly discussed during editorial meetings and story planning. Editors report greater willingness to challenge male-only sourcing patterns, while female journalists describe increased confidence to question stereotypical framing and to pitch stories beyond traditional “soft news” domains. Gender sensitivity is no longer widely perceived as an external or optional concern, but as a legitimate dimension of professional editorial practice.

At the same time, progress remains fragile. Weak leadership enforcement, informal decision-making structures, and the absence of binding institutional policies continue to limit the sustainability of these changes. Safety constraints, including lack of transport, protective equipment, and formal harassment reporting mechanisms, are frequently used to justify excluding women from field reporting, reinforcing occupational segregation within newsrooms.

The assessment also finds that women are rarely treated as authoritative sources in political and security reporting. Cultural norms, family pressure, and reputational risks discourage many qualified women from speaking publicly, while media houses lack organized systems to identify and retain female experts.

To address this gap, SWJO initiated the development of a Women’s Expert Database to support journalists in accessing qualified female sources across sectors. In parallel, the programme expanded advocacy through the Somali Media Association (SOMA), securing commitments from media owners and senior managers to integrate gender principles into editorial policies and to continue use of the GTT beyond the pilot phase.

Overall, the assessment concludes that the programme has successfully achieved its first-phase objective of shifting attitudes and professional norms around gender in Somali media. However, these gains remain largely behavioral and procedural rather than institutional. Without formal policy adoption, internal budget allocations, digital tracking systems, and sustained leadership accountability, current progress is vulnerable to reversal. Long-term impact will depend on continued multi-year investment in institutional reform alongside ongoing capacity-building and sector-level advocacy led by SWJO with support from IMS.

2. Background and Context

The International Media Support (IMS) has been engaged in media development programming in Somalia since 2014, focusing on critical sector challenges such as freedom of expression, journalist safety, and content production. The IMS Sida Programme (July 2024–December 2025) builds upon this long-standing engagement, with a central focus on advancing gender equality and women's inclusion in both media content and professional environments.

The partnership with the Somali Women Journalists Organization (SWJO) is foundational to IMS's gender equality efforts. SWJO has been instrumental in addressing structural barriers for women journalists, which includes advocating for maternity protection and greater decision-making power. Under the 2024–2025 programme, key SWJO-led activities included:

- A small Baseline study on gender in media content.
- Workshops with media stakeholders on barriers to women's inclusion.
- The launch of a Gender in Content Tracking Tool to monitor and analyze gender representation in media output.

The Somali Gender Declaration is a cornerstone of this work. Developed by SWJO under an earlier phase of the SIDA programme and first launched in

2016, it was updated in 2024 with IMS support to expand commitments for strengthening women's roles in the media sector. The Declaration was created to confront major obstacles like lower pay, heightened job loss risk, and social stigmatization. Its success is attributed to SWJO's ownership and its resulting measurably positive changes, including:

- Four media houses introducing three months of paid maternity leave.
- Six media houses promoting women to decision-making positions.
- Increased accountability, such as the Ministry of Information being pressured to withdraw a job ad for female TV journalists based on appearance.

3. Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of this assessment, as defined by the Terms of Reference (TOR), is to document and analyse the results and emerging impact of the IMS/SWJO gender work in media during the 2024–2025 programme cycle, with a particular focus on the programme's strategic shift towards addressing gender representation in media content.

This assessment seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To document results and emerging impacts of SWJO's gender-related interventions, with a primary focus on changes in gender representation and portrayal within media content, while also considering implications for newsroom practices and professional environments.
2. To critically examine the effectiveness and limitations of the programme's content-focused approach, including an in-depth analysis of the introduction and early piloting of the Gender Tracking Tool (GTT), documenting what worked, what did not, and the underlying reasons for these outcomes, including technical, institutional, and contextual factors influencing uptake.

3. To capture experiences, perceptions, and reflections of journalists, editors, media managers, and partner organizations, particularly regarding the novelty and practical challenges of addressing gender equality through media content rather than solely through workplace conditions.
4. To identify key lessons learned and promising practices emerging from this content-centred approach, with the aim of informing future IMS and SWJO gender programming and supporting the gradual institutionalization of gender-responsive content production.
5. To document illustrative stories of change and emerging gender champions, highlighting individual and organizational efforts that demonstrate early shifts in thinking, practice, or leadership around gender equality in media content.

4. Scope and Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design tailored to capture the nuances of gender institutionalization and structural barriers in the Somali media sector. By focusing on Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across five strategic regions, Baidoa, Mogadishu, Kismayo, Beletweyne, and Dhusamareb the assessment mapped the gap between policy intent and newsroom reality.

4.1. Data Collection and Sampling

The primary data collection method was the Key Informant Interview (KII). A targeted sample of 40 individuals including frontline journalists, editors and producers, directors and managers. Interviews were conducted through a hybrid approach of **in-depth face-to-face sessions** in Baidoa and Mogadishu, supplemented by **remote consultations** in Kismayo, Beletweyne, and Dhusamareb to ensure comprehensive regional representation.

In addition to conducting Key Informant Interviews, the consultant participated as an observer in the Gender Tracking Tool training held in Baidoa

on 18 December 2025. This observation provided direct insight into newsroom dynamics and grounded the findings in the operational realities of media houses in South West State.

4.2. Ethical Considerations

The assessment adhered to strict ethical protocols to protect the professional and personal safety of all participants:

- **Informed Consent:** Participation was entirely voluntary, with a full disclosure of the study's objectives and the right to withdraw without prejudice.
- **Anonymity as a Shield:** Given the sensitive nature of newsroom power dynamics, all data was strictly anonymized. Attribution is limited to professional roles (e.g., "News Editor," "Female Reporter") to prevent retribution and encourage intellectual honesty.
- **Contextual Sensitivity:** A "Do No Harm" approach was prioritized, ensuring that discussions regarding gender, safety, and leadership remained culturally sensitive and professional in tone.

4.3. Constraints and Limitations

The assessment successfully fulfilled its data collection objectives as agreed upon during the inception phase. The only notable hurdles were **technical in nature**, primarily involving unstable internet connectivity and intermittent telecommunication disruptions during remote sessions in regional areas. These were managed through flexible scheduling and follow-up calls to ensure that the depth of the qualitative data remained consistent across all target locations.

5. Desk Review: Evolution of Gender Equality in Somali Media (2016–2025)

This desk review serves as the longitudinal baseline for the current assessment. Conducted prior to the data collection phase, it provided the historical and

thematic context necessary to design the Key Informant Interview (KII) guides used across the five target regions. By synthesizing the strategic documentation ranging from foundational studies to technical training tools this review identifies the benchmarks against which current newsroom progress is measured.

The insights gained from this desk review form the analytical foundation for the following assessment findings. The review identified a persistent aspirational-operational gap where media houses sign declarations but struggle to implement them daily. Consequently, the 2025 Assessment was specifically designed to investigate this gap, using the KIIs to move beyond what is written in reports and uncover the lived operational realities, structural gatekeeping, and logistical hurdles that either facilitate or frustrate the journey toward gender parity in Somali media.

5.1. Context and Baseline Conditions on Gender in Somali Media

SWJO through the support of IMS, conducted two baseline studies. According to the 2016/2017 baseline study, it marked the first systematic effort to document gender inequality in Somali media. Its primary focus was on the working conditions of women journalists, highlighting severe underrepresentation of women in the media workforce (23 percent) and their marginal presence in senior decision-making roles (14 percent). The baseline study documented widespread insecurity, lack of formal recruitment and promotion policies, limited access to training, and persistent social stigma surrounding women's participation in journalism.

While the study acknowledged that a gender-literate workforce was essential for producing balanced and non-stereotypical media content, it did not directly analyze media output. Gender equality was therefore framed primarily as a workplace and protection issue, closely aligned with safety, dignity, and professional access.

By contrast, the 2024/2025 baseline reflects a strategic shift towards examining gender representation within media content itself. Rather than focusing solely on who works in media, the study analyzed who is visible, heard, and framed as authoritative in news and programmes. This shift responded to growing evidence that improvements in working conditions alone had not translated into meaningful changes in media narratives or public discourse.

Despite nearly a decade of gender-focused media interventions, both baseline studies reveal striking continuity in women's marginalization in media. The 2024/2025 baseline shows that women account for only 12 percent of news participants and are rarely featured as experts or leaders. When women do appear, they are predominantly associated with "soft" content areas such as culture, health, or poetry, rather than political, economic, or public affairs programming.

These findings mirror earlier concerns raised in 2016/2017 regarding cultural norms, patriarchal attitudes, and perceptions of journalism as an unsuitable profession for women. The persistence of these patterns suggests that structural and editorial barriers remain deeply embedded, limiting the extent to which gender equality gains within the workforce are reflected in media output.

Both baseline studies highlight the concentration of editorial power in male-dominated leadership structures. In 2016/2017, 84 percent of managers interviewed were men, with recruitment and promotion processes largely informal and lacking transparency. Similarly, the 2024/2025 baseline found that seven out of eight surveyed media managers were male, and that gender inclusion in content decisions was often dependent on individual discretion rather than institutional policy.

The absence of formal gender policies, editorial guidelines, and accountability mechanisms emerges as a consistent institutional weakness. While many media professionals expressed support for gender equality in principle, both

studies suggest that voluntary commitments alone were insufficient to drive sustained change in newsroom practices.

5.2. Evolution of Gender Commitments and Measuring Change

The Gender Respect Declaration (GRD), first introduced in 2019, represents a critical milestone in formalizing gender commitments within Somali media. Initially centered on workplace safety, dignity, and equal opportunity, the Declaration evolved over time to include explicit commitments to gender-balanced media content. By the end of 2025, 55 media houses nationwide had signed the Declaration, reflecting broad normative acceptance of its principles.

However, desk review of annual reports highlights a persistent aspirational versus operational gap. While the Declaration provides high-level legitimacy and a moral contract for directors, it lacks built-in enforcement mechanisms. This structural limitation explains the program's subsequent move toward technical tools and capacity building.

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, the program deployed a nationwide series of workshops in 2025 (Mogadishu, Baidoa, Kismaayo, and Dhuusamareeb). The design of these interventions was explicitly phased: initial sessions targeted media managers and directors to secure institutional buy-in, while subsequent phases engaged frontline content producers (reporters and anchors).

The workshop curriculum shifted from general awareness-raising toward specific skill-building in inclusive journalism. Participants were trained on identifying bias in sourcing, developing databases of female experts, and mainstreaming gender into hard news beats like politics and economics. These workshops were successfully received by the targeted participants and has changed the conversation into the newsroom.

The program reports acknowledge that this was a necessary step that changed individual attitudes. The documentation indicates that institutional change requires a secondary layer of robust and routine accountability for behaviors changes and practices.

The Gender in Media Content Tracking Tool (GTT) was introduced in 2025 as the program's primary mechanism for measuring change and fostering editorial reflection. Unlike a static report, the GTT was designed as a learning and monitoring tool for media houses to use internally. It tracks the Gender Parity Index (GPI) across various program types, providing managers with empirical data on their own performance.

The early piloting with outlets like Arlaadi and Risaala Radio revealed the event-driven reality of Somali media, where reliance on male-dominated political press conferences results in frequent zero-women entries. The documentation suggests the GTT's early value lies in its role as an accountability mirror; it forces editorial teams to confront the statistical reality of women's exclusion, though sustained uptake remains a challenge due to high staff turnover and the labor-intensive nature of manual content tracking.

What the Desk Review Reveals

The longitudinal desk review illuminates a strategic evolution from workforce-based protection (2016) to content-driven accountability (2025), successfully transitioning the Somali media discourse from symbolic "why" to operational "how." By reinforcing the high-level **Gender Respect Declaration** with regional skills-based **workshops** and the data-driven **Gender Tracking Tool (GTT)**, the program created a three-layered framework for change. However, a persistent "aspirational-operational gap" remains, where deep-seated patriarchal structures and an event-driven news cycle continue to stall the translation of individual awareness into institutionalized parity. Consequently, while the normative case for equality is now broadly accepted, daily editorial habits remain in a state of fragile, early-stage transformation.

Drawing on the 40 Key Informant Interviews (KIs), the report now moves beyond the documentation to analyze the lived operational realities investigating what has worked, what has met resistance, and how journalists and managers are navigating the structural hurdles of the Somali media landscape.

6. KIs Findings

The assessment confirms that the IMS–SWJO programme successfully initiated incremental but meaningful shifts in editorial awareness, confidence, and gender-sensitive practice among journalists and editors. These changes represent an important transition from gender being a non-issue to becoming a deliberate point of reflection within newsroom routines.

The assessment also confirms that these emerging gains remain fragile and uneven, constrained by pre-existing structural barriers particularly the absence of dedicated budgets, formalized HR systems, and operational safety infrastructure. The assessment demonstrates that the IMS–SWJO partnership has successfully achieved a **foundational mindset change** across the media landscape.

A critical distinction must be made between **individual awareness** and **institutional reform**. While the one-year cycle has been highly effective in shifting perceptions, the assessment concludes that deep structural changes, such as formal policy enforcement and dedicated gender budgeting, require sustained, multi-year interventions to become permanent features of Somali media management.

6.1. Content Transformation: In Progress, Not Yet Institutionalized

6.1.1. Editorial Culture Shift and Incremental Change

KIs across all regions indicate a clear shift in how journalists and editors plan, source, and review stories following the gender mainstreaming interventions led by SWJO with support from IMS. Gender is no longer treated as an optional

consideration but as a routine editorial criterion applied during pitch meetings, script development, and pre-broadcast review. Both male and female journalists described moving from general awareness that “gender matters” to technical application in daily newsroom practice.

The “mental pause” in story planning: A majority of reporters described adopting a deliberate cognitive checkpoint during story development. Before finalizing scripts, they now assess whose voices are included, how women are portrayed, and whether language reinforces stereotypes. This practice represents a shift from reactive correction to anticipatory editorial judgment.

“Before, I would just write the story and submit it. Now I think about how women are described, whose voice is missing, and whether the story shows women as weak or capable. The trainings and discussions changed how I edit my work.” Female journalist, Baidoa

“During a story on livestock loss, the training reminded me to widen the lens and include women’s perspectives on household impact.” Reporter, Dhuusamareeb

“During a story on local market vendors, I ensured that female traders’ voices were represented equally with men’s. This drew positive feedback from my editor and listeners who appreciated the balance.” Reporter, Kismayo

This shift has encouraged journalists to move beyond reliance on male-dominated institutional sources and to actively seek women’s perspectives at community level, particularly in stories related to livelihoods, local governance, and humanitarian issues.

Emergence of a protective editorial workflow: Editors and producers in multiple regions reported the development of informal but consistent practices for handling sensitive stories, particularly those involving sexual and gender-based violence and community disputes. These practices prioritize victim dignity, anonymity, and the involvement of female staff in reporting and editing. Editors and producers described systematically assigning sensitive cases to female

reporters and applying stricter review standards before broadcast through routine correction of gender-biased framing before stories go on air.

"I ensured that the TV coverage was sensitive, protected the victim's identity, and involved female staff in responsible reporting, which would not have happened without GTT guidance." Editor, Beletweyne

"I changed a headline that originally portrayed a woman leader in a passive tone. After reviewing it using GTT principles, we highlighted her role as an active decision-maker instead of framing her as a victim." Producer, Dhuusamareeb

These practices demonstrate that gender sensitivity is increasingly treated as a professional standard linked to journalistic ethics and safety, rather than as an advocacy add-on.

Active editorial intervention and gatekeeping for inclusion: Senior editors and mid-level managers in Mogadishu, Dhuusamareeb, and Beletweyne reported moving beyond symbolic support for gender balance to direct editorial enforcement. In several media houses, content is returned for revision or blocked outright if it excludes women's voices or applies biased framing.

"After reviewing a political story, we added a quote from a female youth activist to avoid a male-only panel of voices. In some cases, we refuse to air segments if they lack even a single female voice." Editor, Dhuusamareeb

"I once changed a headline that framed a woman politician negatively. We adjusted it to focus on her policy contribution instead of personal details." Producer, Mogadishu

"In one story about business challenges, the GTT reminded us to include women entrepreneurs. We added a female interviewee and adjusted the headline to reflect gender inclusion." Chief Editor, Mogadishu

These interventions indicate that gender representation is increasingly embedded in editorial authority structures in some regions.

However, Klls from Baidoa reveal that this model of management-led enforcement remains weak and uneven. Female journalists reported limited editorial protection when gender concerns conflict with decisions made by senior male managers, particularly regarding training participation, equipment access, and story assignment.

“Even when opportunities come, it depends on the director. If he says no, that is the end. There is no policy and no editor who will question it or defend us.” — Female journalist, Baidoa

This contrast highlights significant regional variation in the institutional depth of editorial reform.

6.1.2. The Gender Tracking Tool

Klls indicate that the Gender Tracking Tool has shifted gender mainstreaming from an abstract commitment to a practical newsroom instrument. Journalists, editors, and producers across regions described using the GTT not only as a reporting form but as a framework that shapes editorial judgment, negotiation, and accountability.

At the time of the assessment, the Gender Tracking Tool was still in an early pilot phase and had been implemented in a limited number of outlets, including Risaala Radio, Arlaadi Media Network (TV), Kulmiye Radio, and Shabelle TV & Radio. Interviewees also referenced Ergo and Wadaag radios as comparative examples demonstrating that systematic inclusive sourcing is operationally feasible within Somali newsrooms.

Many reporters explained that even when formal tracking sheets are not completed, the GTT has been internalized as a mental checklist during story development. This is particularly evident in fast-paced news environments where technical constraints limit full documentation.

“Even when I don’t fill in the form, I still use the questions in my head. I ask myself: how many women are speaking? Are they experts or just victims? Is the story balanced?” Reporter, Mogadishu

“The tool changed how I think. Before I would just rush to finish the story. Now I stop and check whether women are included properly.” Female reporter, Kismayo

In Baidoa, where GTT training was conducted during the assessment period, female journalists described the tool as their first structured method for evaluating their own output and raising concerns in editorial discussions.

“Before the training, we had no way to explain why something was unfair. Now we can point to the tool and say: this is the standard.” — Female journalist, Baidoa

Female journalists in several regions reported that the GTT has reduced the personal risk of challenging male-dominated editorial decisions. Instead of framing objections as individual opinions, they are able to reference an agreed professional standard introduced through SWJO training with IMS support. This shift has modestly altered power dynamics in editorial spaces by legitimizing women’s input through institutional language rather than personal advocacy.

“When I say a story is not balanced, they can ignore me. When I say the GTT shows we have zero female sources, they listen.” Female reporter, Beletweyne

“It helps us argue professionally, not emotionally. That makes a big difference in meetings with senior editors.” — Female producer, Mogadishu

Editors in Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Dhuusamareeb described using GTT principles during final content review. In some stations, stories are delayed or revised if gender representation is absent or biased. These practices indicate that the GTT is beginning to influence not only reporters’ behavior but also institutional gatekeeping functions.

“Now when a script reaches my desk, I automatically check if women appear at all. If not, I send it back.” — Editor, Kismayo

“Sometimes we stop the story from going on air until another source is added. This did not happen before the training.” — News editor, Mogadishu

Despite these gains, KIs consistently highlighted constraints that limit routine application of the tool: limited access to computers and printers; unstable electricity supply. In addition, weak or costly internet connectivity; absence of digital archiving systems; and heavy workloads during breaking news cycles. These challenges are most acute in Baidoa and Beletweyne.

As a result, GTT use is uneven and often informal, relying more on memory and discussion than on systematic documentation. Several editors expressed concern that without continued technical support, refresher training, and integration into newsroom systems, the GTT could gradually be abandoned. This reinforces the broader finding that behavioral change is advancing faster than institutional embedding.

6.1.3. Implementation realities: barriers to Institutionalization

While editorial practices have begun to shift, KIs confirm that structural conditions within and outside newsrooms continue to limit how far these changes translate into consistent content transformation. Respondents across all regions identified three interrelated constraints: access to female sources, technological and workflow limitations, and production pressure during breaking news.

The Sourcing Constraints: The KIs reveal that low representation in hard news is driven by a conflict between newsroom speed and societal norms. Male officials are concentrated in accessible, public official spaces. Female professionals, by contrast, face reputational risks, family resistance, and community scrutiny for appearing in the media. This barrier was most pronounced in Baidoa and Beletweyne, where reporters described frequent

refusals from potential female sources and restrictions imposed by male relatives.

"The main challenge is the limited number of women experts. Cultural beliefs and privacy concerns often make it difficult to include women's voices, leading to 'expert fatigue' where the same few women are called constantly." Reporter, Beletweyne.

"Some women agree to talk, but later their families stop them. Others ask not to be named." — Reporter, Baidoa

As a result, journalists repeatedly rely on a small pool of female voices, turning inclusion into symbolic representation rather than broad participation and limiting the diversity of perspectives in coverage.

Absence of structured access to female experts: KIs indicate that journalists do not lack motivation to diversify sources but lack organized access. No station reported having a formal, regularly updated database of female experts. Time pressure further discourages exploratory sourcing.

"We want to include women, but when news breaks you call the numbers you already have." — News editor, Mogadishu

"Finding new women experts takes time we don't have during daily production." — Producer, Kismayo

Respondents emphasized that without institutional tools such as expert directories or shared contact lists, inclusion remains dependent on individual effort.

News Editor, Kismayo: *"We require time to localize and contextualize these tools... Limited access to updated equipment and internet connectivity could gradually weaken our gender-sensitive editorial culture."*

Editor, Beletweyne: *"As we start implementing these tools, we need digital systems that fit our workflow. Manual tracking is difficult during breaking news cycles."*

"We understand the tool, but we don't have enough computers or stable power to use it properly in daily work." — Reporter, Baidoa.

The "Process vs. Output" Gap and Sustainability Concerns: Respondents acknowledge that while the process (thinking and pitching) has improved, the output remains low because the shift is not yet institutionalized through formal station policy. A specific trigger for regression is breaking news cycles. During crises, the GTT is often the first protocol abandoned because manual entry is perceived as a luxury the newsroom cannot afford under pressure.

News Producer, Mogadishu: "When social media is breaking news fast, we feel the pressure to skip the gender checks just to keep up. Without digital tracking, the GTT feels like a luxury we can't afford during a crisis."

Female Reporter, Beletweyne: "I worry it could fade if leadership priorities change or donor support reduces. Sometimes, when workloads are high, gender discussions take a back seat."

Regional disparities in gatekeeping were particularly acute. In Baidoa, female respondents reported a systematic information blackout regarding professional development. Unlike in Mogadishu or Beletweyne, where training calls were shared openly, female journalists in Baidoa noted that male managers frequently withheld information about technical training opportunities (camera work, editing) until after the selection process was complete. This technical gatekeeping ensures that hard skills and the equipment that requires them remain a male monopoly, forcing women to remain dependent on male technicians to file their stories.

Together, these constraints mean that content transformation remains fragile. Klls suggest that without institutional investment in structured source databases, digital tracking systems, equipment upgrades, and staffing models that allow journalists sufficient time for ethical and inclusive sourcing, gender-sensitive reporting will continue to depend on individual commitment rather than being embedded within organizational systems.

6.2. Working Environment: Structural Barriers Confirmed

Klls across all regions indicate that improvements in editorial practice are not matched by equivalent changes in newsroom power structures, employment systems, or resource allocation. While gender-sensitive norms are increasingly visible in daily editorial interactions, women's professional advancement and safety remain constrained by informal management practices, weak policy enforcement, and material shortages.

6.2.1. Assignments and Career Equity

Female journalists reported increased participation in editorial meetings and greater access to hard-news assignments compared to previous years. However, vertical progression into permanent senior management remains limited. Respondents described a recurring pattern in which women are appointed to leadership roles during high-visibility project cycles but replaced by men once external oversight diminishes.

A female journalist in Kismayo observed: "A few years ago, several women were given leadership roles. But when they left, those positions were filled by men again. The progress we made is slowly being reversed."

Women who hold managerial titles also reported exclusion from final decision-making bodies, particularly hiring committees, which remain overwhelmingly male. This reinforces long-term control of newsroom power by the same group of actors.

In Baidoa, exclusion is more explicit and systematic. Female journalists described restricted access to training opportunities, promotion pathways, and paid contracts. Professional development is often controlled informally by male supervisors, requiring women to negotiate individually for approval.

"If a training comes, men are selected first. We must go to the director ourselves and ask. Sometimes even then, they block us. Most of us work without contracts. You

cannot argue for promotion when you are not even officially employed.” — Female journalist, Baidoa

These conditions limit women's bargaining power and weaken the sustainability of skills gained through training programmes.

6.2.2. Policy formalization

KIs reveal there is high awareness of the gender declaration and action plans, but a significant gap in their formalization into binding policies. However, few media houses have translated these commitments into binding internal policies, HR manuals, or employment contracts. As a result, gender standards remain normative rather than enforceable.

“Middle managers advocate for gender-sensitive budgeting (e.g., maternity pay), but they lack financial authority. Decisions remain centralized with station owners who often do not value gender inclusion beyond its ‘aspirational’ declaration.”

Producer Mogadishu.

The absence of formal policy mechanisms is most visible in the area of workplace safety. No station reported having an anonymous reporting system for sexual harassment. Staff safety is therefore treated as an ethical principle rather than an institutional right.

A female journalist in Beletweyne stated: “I think IMS and SWJO should engage media owners directly to advocate for formal gender policies, ensure equal pay, and establish safe reporting mechanisms for harassment.”

6.2.3. Safety and Logistics

While security risks in Somalia are undeniable, the assessment identifies a systemic pattern where "safety" is weaponized as a mechanism of professional exclusion. KIs reveal that male editors frequently cite duty-of-care obligations to justify a blanket ban on female reporters covering high-profile security or political beats.

Male reporters are provided with logistics and security details to cover hard news, whereas female reporters are simply told it is too dangerous and reassigned to health or education stories. By denying women access to the most prestigious and politically relevant beats under the guise of protection, media houses inadvertently cap their career progression and public visibility.

True duty of care should involve risk mitigation (e.g., safe transport, secure comms) that *enables* women to report, rather than risk avoidance that *silences* them.

A news editor in Dhuusamareeb explained: *“If a woman has to take a public bus to cover a story in a difficult area, I as an editor feel I cannot allow it. So, the story goes to a man who can use a motorbike.”*

Female journalists interpreted this practice as protective in intention but exclusionary in effect:

“They say it is for our protection, but it means we never build experience. The dangerous stories always go to men.” — Female reporter, Baidoa

In Dhuusamareeb, KIs also highlighted digital safety as part of logistical exclusion. Women often rely on personal funds to maintain phone credit and internet access during assignments, increasing both financial and security risks.

“Without station-provided credit or internet, women must use personal resources to stay in contact during emergencies.” — Field reporter, Dhuusamareeb

6.2.4. External Social Pressure and Visibility Risks

Even where internal newsroom culture has become more supportive, external social norms continue to constrain women's participation, particularly in political and security reporting. Journalists across regions reported family pressure, community surveillance, and reputational stigma attached to public visibility. In Baidoa, this pressure was described as a direct deterrent to entering or remaining in journalism.

“Women face ‘reputational backlash’ from their families and clans for being too visible on hard topics. While the newsroom is becoming safer, the external environment is not.” **Reporter Beletweyne.**

“My family told me journalism is not suitable for a woman. They fear what people will say if they see me on radio.” Female journalist, Baidoa.

Across all regions, a critical institutional gap is the lack of lactation rooms or childcare flexibility. The inability to return to work after childbirth continues to drive attrition among experienced female journalists.

6.2.5. Institutional Barriers and Sustainability

KIIs consistently framed gender reforms as project-driven rather than institution-owned. Journalists and managers expressed concern that progress in gender-sensitive reporting and use of the GTT would weaken once donor funding declines.

A female journalist in Beletweyne warned: “I worry progress could fade if leadership priorities change or donor support reduces.”

In Beletweyne, an additional risk factor was identified: the growing migration of journalists to independent social-media platforms to supplement income. This shift bypasses newsroom editorial standards and gender guidelines.

“Many reporters now operate their own online platforms, which lack the accountability maintained in institutional media.” — Reporter, Beletweyne

Managers emphasized the absence of shared institutional infrastructure for sustaining reform:

“We need a central gender resource hub with Somali-language materials, expert lists, and real-life reporting examples.” — Manager, Kismayo

7. Stories of Change and Participant Reflections

This section presents selected stories drawn from the assessment to illustrate how gender mainstreaming initiatives supported by SWJO, with technical backing from IMS, are experienced in daily newsroom practice. These accounts reflect personal and institutional change observed by editors, producers, and journalists across regions.

At Danan Radio in Mogadishu, gender balance has shifted from being an occasional discussion to a routine editorial consideration. Editors reported that gender representation is now reviewed during weekly planning meetings alongside story angles and production schedules.

One editor explained that gender is no longer treated as an external requirement linked to donor projects, but as part of professional newsroom standards. Reporters also described greater confidence to raise concerns when stories rely exclusively on male sources or reproduce stereotypes.

This change has resulted in more frequent inclusion of women in political and security reporting and has normalized internal accountability for sourcing practices.

In Beletweyne, female journalists emphasized that physical safety had long been a silent barrier to their participation in field reporting and high-visibility assignments. Following sustained engagement by SWJO, one media house installed CCTV cameras within its premises and adopted informal zero-tolerance norms around harassment.

A female reporter described how this visibly changed the working environment:

“Before, we were careful about even staying late in the newsroom. Now there is monitoring and management takes complaints seriously. It makes it easier to focus on work instead of fear.”

Editors confirmed that improved safety conditions made it easier to recruit and retain women, reducing early dropout and enabling junior journalists to transition into full-time reporting roles.

In Kismayo, the promotion of a woman to General Programme Manager at Radio Dal Bile was repeatedly cited as a turning point. Colleagues described how her appointment changed newsroom dynamics with female reporters felt more confident pitching governance and security stories. Furthermore, editorial meetings became more inclusive and junior staff had a visible leadership role model.

A producer noted that the promotion challenged external perceptions as well:

“Some guests still expect a man to be in charge. But when they see her managing the station, it changes expectations.”

While structural barriers remain, journalists in Kismayo described this appointment as proof that long-term gender engagement can translate into authority, not only participation.

In Baidoa, the assessment documented a very different form of change. Women journalists described working in environments where promotions, training access, and contracts remain controlled by male managers and where no senior women hold leadership roles. In this context, mentorship has not emerged as a formal system but as peer-to-peer survival support.

One female journalist explained:

“There are no senior women to defend us or teach us. If we don't support each other, many women leave. We advise each other how to deal with editors, how to insist on attending trainings, and how to continue even when our work is delayed or ignored.”

For these journalists, the GTT training delivered during the assessment offered their first professional language for discussing exclusion and sourcing practices in technical rather than personal terms.

Another participant noted: "Now when I write a script, I ask myself if women are included or only shown as victims. I did not think like this before the training."

Across regions, female journalists described a gradual expansion of their professional identity beyond social and community programming. Several reporters explained that training sessions encouraged editors to assign women to governance, humanitarian coordination, and security stories. One journalist stated:

"I used to wait to be given lifestyle stories. Now I pitch ideas about displacement and aid distribution. Sometimes they are accepted."

Editors confirmed that they increasingly assess assignments through a gender lens, particularly for sensitive reporting involving survivors of violence. Taken together, these stories demonstrate that the program's impact is not limited to formal policies or tools. Change is experienced as: increased professional confidence, safer working environments, expanded editorial authority, and new forms of peer support in restrictive contexts.

8. Lessons Learned and Promising Practices

This section synthesizes the programme's positive outcomes (promising practices) alongside the systemic constraints identified during implementation (lessons learned). It confirms that while meaningful progress has been achieved at individual and newsroom levels, these gains remain vulnerable without formal institutionalization, long-term leadership commitment, and dedicated financial resources.

8.1. Promising Practices

These practices reflect changes among editors, producers, and both male and female journalists, rather than isolated individual attitudes.

Promising practices observed include:

- ✓ Editors and producers in multiple regions now routinely consider gender balance during story planning, script review, and pre-broadcast discussions. Male editors reported greater willingness to revise male-only scripts, challenge biased framing, and delay publication to improve representation. Female journalists reported increased confidence to raise gender gaps as professional issues rather than personal complaints. This indicates that gender sensitivity has shifted from an external advocacy message to an internal newsroom norm.
- ✓ Frontline journalists demonstrated improved technical capacity to: assess sourcing diversity, avoid stereotypical language, match reporters to sensitive stories ethically, and integrate women's perspectives into political, humanitarian, and security reporting. These skills were directly attributed to newsroom workshops, editorial coaching, and GTT training delivered by SWJO with IMS support. Reporters emphasized that the training moved gender from an abstract concept to a set of concrete editorial actions.
- ✓ The GTT emerged as a practical tool that: supports reporters in self-auditing stories, enables female journalists to challenge exclusion using data rather than confrontation, and assists editors in enforcing minimum standards before broadcast. Strong demand for refresher training indicates that journalists perceive the tool as useful for professional quality control, not merely donor reporting.
- ✓ Female journalists across regions reported greater willingness to: pitch hard news stories, participate actively in editorial meetings, and accept field assignments previously dominated by men. In some stations, editors have intentionally assigned women to high-profile stories to reinforce this

shift. These developments demonstrate progress from participation toward professional influence.

- ✓ Some media houses have taken concrete steps to improve workplace safety, including installing CCTV systems, introducing informal zero-tolerance norms for harassment, and prioritizing female reporters for sensitive coverage. These measures reduce the number of female and junior journalists who leave the profession, strengthen staff retention, and enable women to remain in journalism long enough to build experience and advance professionally.
- ✓ In selected locations, women have advanced into managerial positions. These cases demonstrate that sustained engagement can influence promotion practices and newsroom authority structures, even where formal HR systems remain weak. Their presence has been shown to affect assignment patterns, newsroom culture, and the confidence of junior female staff.

Collectively, these practices demonstrate that sustained engagement by SWJO, with ongoing support from IMS, can shift professional norms, strengthen gender-responsive reporting skills, and influence newsroom culture. However, the assessment also confirms that without formal policies, digital systems, and internal budget allocations, these gains remain fragile and uneven across regions.

8.2. Core Lessons Learned

The assessment also highlights critical limitations that shape future programming design.

- ✓ **Institutional change lags behind behavioral change.** While individual editors and journalists adopt gender-sensitive practices, formal integration into HR systems, budgets, contracts, and digital workflows remains minimal.

- ✓ **Tools require infrastructure.** Manual tracking and ethical sourcing are difficult to sustain without equipment, connectivity, archiving systems, and adequate staffing levels.
- ✓ **Gender reform remains vulnerable to leadership turnover and workload pressure.** In high-pressure news cycles or when donor engagement declines, gender practices are often deprioritized.
- ✓ **Context matters.** Regions such as Baidoa require foundational investment in contracts, training access, and management accountability before advanced tools can be fully effective.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1. Conclusions

The assessment concludes that the IMS/SWJO partnership has acted as a critical disruptor in the Somali media landscape, successfully moving the sector from passive awareness to active engagement. The introduction of the **Gender Tracking Tool (GTT)** and the revitalization of the **Gender Respect Declaration** have fundamentally altered the newsroom discourse: journalists and editors are no longer asking *why* gender matters, but *how* to achieve it amidst daily pressures.

The program succeeded in creating a cognitive checkpoint for frontline staff a pause where reporters now consciously evaluate their sourcing. However, this individual progress is currently colliding with rigid institutional barriers. The assessment reveals a persistent **aspirational-operational gap**.

While media owners readily sign declarations, these commitments rarely translate into costed internal policies. Without ring-fenced budgets for maternity support or safe transport, gender equality remains a project-based activity rather than a core business value. A concerning pattern of protectionism has emerged, where legitimate security concerns are weaponized by managers to exclude women from high-profile political and

security beats, effectively capping their career progression under the guise of safety.

As seen in regions like Baidoa, the control of technical assets (cameras, editing suites) remains a male monopoly, forcing female reporters to remain dependent on male colleagues to finalize their work. The program has successfully scratched the surface and ignited a necessary storm of change.

However, the gains made are fragile. They currently rest on the enthusiasm of individual champions rather than on permanent institutional scaffolding. Without a sustained **Phase II** intervention focused on deep institutionalization, leadership accountability, and technical empowerment, there is a high risk that the rapid staff turnover and high-pressure environment of Somali media will erode these hard-won advances.

To transform this fragile progress into permanent professional standards, the focus must now shift from raising awareness to enforcing accountability. The following strategic recommendations provide a roadmap for this necessary transition.

9.2. Recommendations

1. IMS should continue to support media houses to formally adopt and operationalize the Gender Declaration and related Action Plans as institutional reference frameworks. The assessment finds that while commitments exist among majority media houses, formal adoption remains uneven across partners, underscoring the need for continued facilitation, follow-up, and peer learning.
2. SWJO and IMS should move the GTT from an optional reference to a **daily newsroom practice**. To support this, a **non-monetary reward system** should be introduced. IMS can profile and celebrate gender champion media houses that successfully utilize the GTT and implement gender policies, providing them with professional visibility as industry leaders.

3. To move the Gender Tracking Tool (GTT) from an optional reference to a daily standard, IMS and SWJO should implement a value-driven recognition system. Stations that consistently submit GTT data and meet parity targets receive a certification.
4. Building on the 2024–2025 engagement of SOMA media owners and directors, IMS should continue to target senior leadership as the critical leverage point for institutionalization. Future interventions should provide refresher training on gender equality specifically for senior executives, utilizing short, practical tools like leadership dialogues and handouts to sustain their commitment to policy priorities.
5. Interviewees emphasized the need for continuous training and mentorship programs, specifically targeting both male and female journalists. Recommendations were made to provide gender equality refresher training specifically for senior staff, producers, and editors who make daily content decisions.
6. Interviewees suggested creating national and regional networks for female journalists to support one another, exchange experiences, and mentor junior reporters.
7. To ensure the high quality and sustained delivery of training, SWJO should implement a ToT program. This will build a roster of certified local facilitators and journalists who can deliver future trainings across Somalia, reducing dependency on SWJO team and embedding expertise within the local media community.
8. All media houses should be encouraged to establish their own Women's Expertise Database. To ensure this is not viewed solely as "women's work," the mapping of these female experts should be conducted by pairs of male and female journalists, fostering a culture of shared responsibility for diverse sourcing.
9. More awareness sessions at the community level area recommended to reduce cultural barriers and societal restrictions that discourage women from joining the media profession.