Gender, Media and Disabilities in Tanzania: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

During the current academic year, a Polytechnic of Namibia student, Emsie Erastus, had the opportunity to undertake a semester-long internship at Gender Links, as part of her experiential learning. When I saw her portfolio submitted for assessment I thought: what an experience for this young woman - she will remember this for the rest of her life! This was evidence, if ever we needed it, that if we are going to transform gender relations in the media, we need to start with the journalists of tomorrow. That is where media education comes in. We stand here in the 21st Century wondering how and why it is that women and men remain unequal and, specifically, how women continue to be represented through various, often demeaning, stereotypes. What has been considered the "male" agenda has permeated the thoughts and beliefs of society at large, and is so deeply rooted that it is difficult to assess its origins, or claim it is still perpetuated solely by a dominant masculine outlook. So how does one dismantle such a paradigm? Ruminating on Audre Lorde, is it really true that the master‟s tools cannot dismantle the master‟s house, and what about the media house? Gender Links (GL) believes that the media might well play a key role in enforcing age old perceptions, and GL has dedicated its work to promoting equality in and through the media. By empowering women with tools to engage with the media that surround them, this could set into motion a long-awaited paradigm shift. GL has started by assessing exactly where women stand as creators and sources of media, as well as how women are represented through the media. Several studies have been undertaken to this extent and further guides have been created to teach students, trainers and media professionals how to dissect media outputs to notice the ways in which women might be stigmatised and disregarded. The Gender in Media Education Audit (GIME) brings us closer to the root of the problem. With few answers as to why women remain a marginal group in this sphere, it became necessary to go back to the beginning: media education andtraining. Over the last three years, GL has sought to deepen its relations with media education institutions in the region through the Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC), a partnership between media development and knowledge institutions to collect, connect and collaborate on issues of gender, media and diversity. The partnership has made it possible to gather information from a representative sample of institutions around the region, as well as begin practical collaboration, such as the internship programme referred to earlier. Throughout the GIME audit it became clear that the students are the greatest advocates for incorporating gender into their training. They were clear that not only did they want to learn more about gender: they wanted to know how this knowledge would change the media landscape into which they chose to venture.

KEYWORDS: Disabilities in Tanzania, Media, Gender