

# GENDER AND CRITICAL MEDIA - INFORMATION LITERACY IN DIGITAL AGE – KENYA, SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA

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Author pre-print (accepted) deposited in CURVE February 2016

**Original citation & hyperlink:**

Mudhai, O. F. , Musa, A. and Wright, B. (Forthcoming) GENDER AND CRITICAL MEDIA---  
INFORMATION LITERACY IN DIGITAL AGE – KENYA, SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA. Journal of  
African Media Studies, volume (In Press)  
(hyperlink not yet available)

ISSN 2040-199X  
ESSN 1751-7974

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Accepted for special (literacy) edition (2016?) of *Journal of African Media Studies*  
(Pre-print version based on [RoMEO yellow](#) – to cite, check with authors or consult published version)

**GENDER AND CRITICAL MEDIA-INFORMATION LITERACY IN DIGITAL AGE –  
KENYA, SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA**

Okoth Fred Mudhai, Aliyu Musa and Bianca Wright

## **GENDER AND CRITICAL MEDIA-INFORMATION LITERACY IN DIGITAL AGE – KENYA, SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA**

### **Abstract**

What unites US President Barack Obama’s July 2015 Kenya visit, a South African graduate of media, communication and culture, and select Nigerian voluntary organisations? Three decades after Kenya hosted the United Nations [1985 World Congress on Women](#) to tackle issues of gender-based violence (GBV) and enhance women’s societal standing constitutionally, legally, socio-culturally and politically, the country experienced a 2014 wave of public stripping of women – some captured on video and distributed via social media. These forms of human rights violations, especially in Nairobi, were happening in a country that not only hosted a major global women’s event resulting in decades of civil society bloom in this activism area but also whose new constitution prescribes gender equity and whose recent laws toughen punishment for sexual offences. Yet Kenya is not the only country, especially in Africa, where ‘waves’ of sexual violence have occurred; other notable examples include South Africa and Zimbabwe. With foci on Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria, we examine the extent to which selected agents have used media to build capacity of citizens to take critical approach to gender equity and helped these societies go beyond legalistic methods in challenging socio-cultural attitudes that perpetuate unfair or ‘different’ treatment of women. Our assumption here is that the media construct social reality in some way so in the digital era change agents use a combination of mainstream media and social media to aid critical literacy and help alter retrogressive attitudes harmful to women’s rights and progress.

### **Introduction**

In the current digital age, populations in most parts of the world are supposed to be more literate and better informed – including on gender issues. We are supposed to know better than engage in violence against women (VAW), such as ‘wife-beating’ (Jakobsen 2014). Yet retrogressive and harmful gender relations, like race issues, persist – even in the developed world. In Kenya, women who have been brave enough to seek political leadership have faced gender-based intimidation and humiliation – threatened with sexual violence, such as threats of public undressing – resulting in some of them giving up their ambitions. It is partly this context that made drafters of Kenya’s 2010 referendum constitution to include affirmative action, indicating that men and women have the right to equal treatment and equal opportunities in the “political, economic, cultural and social sphere” (Aura n.d.). The [Constitution](#) provides for a two-thirds gender rule, “that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender”. However, the implementation of this provision has dragged on, with the male-dominated parliament not having created corresponding legislation by Q3 2015. Just as in sexual violence where attitudes, cultures and stereotypes are perpetuated, even by “women socialised to accept, tolerate, or rationalise” (Omotosho 2013: 292.), politics is taken to be

men's domain with women still believed to belong to the kitchen and childcare realms.

In this article, we use framing theory and case study methodology to examine the extent to which selected individuals and organisations have recently produced-portrayed or consumed, and even 'pro-sumed', gender-related content and narratives in selected media. As Jakobsen (2014) reminds us, 'gender' is also about tribulations of men – given sensational reports of 'husband-beaters' in central Kenya (Njagi 2012) – but for the purpose of this article we give more emphasis to the plight of women. Framing news, information and communication in particular ways can work from the perspective of the producer or the consumer to influence opinion, attitudes and behaviour, depending on literacy or 'competence' (Druckman 2001). Framing issues, such as gender, in particular ways can define social norms, even though such 'effect' can be complicated where there are competing 'frames' in the encoding-decoding processes (Chong and Druckman 2007). Whether framing results in mobilisation for good cause or result in elite manipulation is a matter linked to capacity and competence – hence literacy.

We prefer to use 'critical literacy' here because it goes beyond alphabetical, media and information literacies – and involves questing of "ideologies and agendas" (Warnick 2012: 6). "*Critical literacy* has been described as a literacy that encourages a reflective, questioning stance toward the form and content of print and electronic media" (Warnick 2012: 6, citing Tyner 1998). Through critical literacy, we can understand how in some of Africa's public discourses, certain values, such as 'development' and 'security' are elevated, especially by the elites that include some mainstream media, while others, such as 'equity' and 'social justice', are displaced. Egbo (2000), citing Frere and others scholars, notes that "literacy is one of the tools through which social actors negotiate power relations" (p. 171), especially if literacy is seen as "much broader than functional literacy ... [more] as a critical engagement with one's world" (p. 172). In the next section, we focus on varying agents of gender equity literacy and their use of public platforms, including the media, to convey their messages.

### **Educating Kenyans on Gender Equity et al: Obama's Historic Visit-Speech**

In a July 2015 speech to Kenyans in Nairobi, US President Barack Obama (2015) showed he was well briefed about, among other crucial matters uplifting or afflicting the country, gender-literacy and culture. One achievement – if not mission – of his historic visit and key speech was his use of the total media attention to build capacity of citizens and leaders to change the way they view and treat women if the country is to progress as a nation. His lively 'lecture' had just three or so key arguments around "pillars" of progress or development, and he made it clear the one on women was a crucial one [our emphases].

*"It would be better for Kenyans to recognise that no country can achieve its full potential unless it draws on the talents of all its people and that must include the half of Kenyans, may be a little more than half, who are*

women and girls. [Applause] Now, am gonna spend a little time on this”  
([Obama 2015](#) video timeline 27:00ff).

While acknowledging that Kenya is not the only country with “traditions” of “repressing women and treating them differently”, he warned that practices such as “husbands beating their wives” and generally “treating women and girls as second-class citizens” are “*bad traditions, they need to change, they’re holding you back*” ([Obama 2015](#) at 29:18-29:53). He emphasised this last point by repeating it, amidst applause. “There is no excuse for sexual assault, or domestic violence” ([Obama 2015](#) at 30:07). Then Obama, whose Kenyan father was known to be violent to his partners and wives, touched on more sensitive cultural areas that many a Kenyan politician avoids addressing for political reasons [our emphases].

There is no reason that young girls should suffer genital mutilation. There is no place in *civilised* society for the early or forced marriage of children. These traditions ... have no place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. [Applause.] ... Any nation that fails to educate its girls or employ its women, and allowing them to maximise their potential is *doomed* to fall behind in the global economy. [Applause.] ... Imagine if you have a team, and you don’t let half of the team play. That’s *stupid*; that makes no sense. ... Kenya *will not succeed* if it treats women and girls as second-class citizens – I want to be very clear about that ([Obama 2015](#) at 30:11-32:25).

Obama may have been condescending in some of his diction but for anyone who has been following gender-equity campaigns and debates especially from 1980s or academics grappling with complexities and contradictions of feminist in relation to Africa (Ako-Nai 2013), the points he made are not new although his position and profile enabled him to do so in a more direct and powerful way than other agents of change on gender matters. He provided opportunity for gender-equity campaigners, news media and the general public to trumpet Obama’s message via various channels – especially social media. The [Forum for African Women Educationalists \(FAWE\)](#) lobby shared on social media a number of messages on gender from the speech that was broadcast live by mainstream media.

This “proactive approach to amplify” (Pan and Kosicki 1993: 55) or frame the plight of girls and women this way could be linked to FAWE’s youth advocacy training workshop in Nairobi, a month and a half before Obama’s visit, to build the capacity of the younger generation in the area of gender equity, tweeted under the hashtag [#fwtYATW2015](#). One of the key aspects of this training was that this is a matter for the entire society, including boys and men. One tweet read: “[#fwtYATW2015](#) We are bringing boys as well to advocate for gender equality. [@WomenThrive](#).” Part of the training focused on using the media to spread the gender-equity message to the larger population. “[#fwtYATW2015](#) section on how to engage more with media. [#FAWE](#).” After that in mid June for

the Day of the African Child (DAC 2015), FAWE posted on Facebook<sup>1</sup> specific areas covered in Obama’s speech, with hashtags such as #girlseducation; #EndChildMarriageNow, #EducationNowMarriageLater. The key messages were educative and revealing on the matter:

- An estimated 58 million young women in developing countries have been married before their 18th birthday. [#EducationNowMarriageLater](#)
- At present trend, by 2020, 143 million girls would be married before 18, an alarming average of 14.2 million girls every single year. [#EducationNowMarriageLater](#) [#FAWEDAC2015](#) [#FAWE](#) [#EndChildMarriageNow](#) [#ACRWC25](#) [#DAC2015](#) [#EDUCATION](#) [#girlseducation](#)
- The need to advocate and campaign for girls’ education remains paramount [#EducationNowMarriageLater](#) [#DAC2015](#) [#FAWE](#) [#EndChildMarriageNow](#)

One of the web links shared on FAWE social media updates even used some of the language in Obama’s speech [our emphases]. “Child marriage *holds girls back* ... it *holds back* their families, communities and the whole of Africa too” ([GNB 2015](#)). Girls Not Brides, describing itself on its [website](#) as “a global partnership of more than 500 civil society organisations from over 70 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their potential”, amplified this on an [‘End child marriage in Africa’](#) Thunderclap account, with the key message: “40% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa are married as children. That’s TWO in every FIVE girls.”

The synergy between Obama’s gender-equity ‘lecture’ and the decades-old related gender-equity literacy messages does not mean he was ‘used’ by women’s empowerment organisations like FAWE – but he was a willing agent of the campaign. This was within his overall view on human rights, including the Afro-sensitive gays issue, over which he ‘lectured’ Kenyans and their president at a news conference ([Holmes and Scott 2015](#)). “When you start treating people differently ... that’s the path whereby freedoms begin to erode ... bad things happen ... those habits can spread.” One such bad habit that spread at one point in Nairobi was that of public undressing of women among other forms of sexual assaults especially in *matatus* (minibuses), partly due to the way they were dressed. Therefore Obama was a great ‘messenger’ for women’s rights groups such as FAWE and [Centre for Rights Education and Awareness \(CREAW\)](#). All the same, this was within his comfort given that gender-sensitive politics, in relation to economy and rights, enabled him to enjoy record backing from women voters in his 2012 re-election ([McVeigh and Borger 2012](#)). He therefore took his role seriously as an agent of gender-equity education in his father’s homeland.

The significance of this gender literacy focus was also captured in certain symbolic gestures of Obama’s July 2015 visit to Kenya, his first since he ascended to US presidency and the first by a US president. In a disruption of typical Kenyan, African and general protocol especially in relation to foreign affairs, he thrust his half-sister Auma to the forefront of public limelight, as a

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.facebook.com/Forum.for.African.Women.Educationalists>

result foregrounding the role of women, when treated with respect and dignity, in the progress and success of individuals and societies. Media showed Auma, who is not a Kenya government official, among a selected few who welcomed her brother who hugged her warmly before riding with her in the presidential limousine, 'Beast'. A local TV channel noted that "Auma steals the show" ([Capital TV 2015](#)), and in the video some people could be overheard in the background wondering aloud how President "Uhuru *amekanyagiwa*" [has been 'trodden'] ([Capital TV 2015](#) at 2:15). However, the key message Obama and his handlers could have wanted to convey was not so much that 'blood is thicker than water' but that women may be downtrodden, or undermined, in Kenya but they are important. Indeed in the invitation-only gathering of Kenyans addressed by Obama, Auma – rather than a top politician – introduced and invited the US president to the podium. Obama's family may not have accompanied him due to security reasons or concerns about distractions such as 'marriage proposals' to his daughter ([Sky105 2015](#)), but their absence made it easier for humble [Auma](#), who runs German-linked [Sauti Kuu Foundation](#), to steal the show as an example of Kenya's successful role-model women and hopefully change public attitudes.

Mass public education-sensitisation on gender-equity has recently become necessary in Kenya as the country struggles with the implementation of a crucial gender-parity provision in a recently promulgated constitution. Among affirmative action provisions to address past discrimination against women, it requires that not more than two-thirds of members of elective or appointive public bodies belong to the same gender (Articles 27, 81 and 177) but [Kimani \(2015\)](#) of the Institute for Education in Democracy (IED) notes that this "is not guaranteed at the National Assembly and the Senate".

Despite these affirmative action measures, women participation in the 2013 general elections remained very low. There were 19 women candidates for senatorial gubernatorial positions (out of 237 candidates). As a result, no women were elected as senator or governor. Out of the 290 elected National Assembly members, just 5.5 percent are women. For the 1,450 ward representatives positions only 88 (6 percent) of the elected candidates were women. Political representation of Kenyan women now stands at 15 percent versus Rwanda's 56 percent, South Africa's 42 percent, Tanzania's 36 percent and Uganda's 35 percent. Kenya's 15 percent is an improvement from the previous 9.8 percent representation in the 10th Parliament and the increased numbers can be greatly attributed to the reserved seats for the 47 Women Representatives. Although the current representation is the highest level so far of women political leadership in Kenya, it is still very poor showing in this day and age where women's political participation has generally improved around the world ([Kimani 2015](#)).

It would appear that the Kenyan public are not ready to widely accept women leadership – and perhaps many of them see this as "a non-issue", to use President Kenyatta's response to Obama on gay rights (Holmes and Scott 2015). For this reason, public literacy efforts like Obama's agency are as, if not more, important as legislative measures that have proved difficult to design to comply

with constitutional requirements. Kenya's "poor performance" ([Kimani 2015](#)) in the recent trend of increasing women representation in Africa ([Kabwila 2012](#); [The Economist 2013](#); [Tripp 2013](#); [Look 2014](#); [Ighobor 2015](#)), with women ascending to presidency in Central African Republic (Catherine Samba-Panza), Liberia (Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf) and Malawi (Joyce Banda), is attributable to "patriarchal culture and electoral system" ([Kimani 2015](#)). All the same, a recent Afrobarometre survey showed that "a vast majority of Africans (72%) agree that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men" ([Ighobor 2015](#)). Although this support is uneven and decreased slightly across 18 countries tracked between 2005-2012 (from 75% to 72%), the "survey of more than 50,000 people in 34 countries shows broad support of women's equality ... and widespread acceptance of women's leadership capabilities" ([Chingwete, Richmond and Alpin 2014](#): 1, 6). For Kenya, only 13 per cent, half the average, rejected equal rights for women in favour of traditional law as overall support for women's equality increased from 67 per cent in 2005 to 84 per cent in 2012 ([Chingwete, Richmond and Alpin 2014](#): 7-8). This sharply contrasts Kenyan voter behaviour as summarised by IED ([Kimani 2015](#)). The Kenyan media focused more on the pacifying and depoliticising infotainment spectacle (Kellner 2003: 3ff) of Obama's visit rather than use his speeches and symbolic actions-choices to refocus the country's attention on critical issues such as gender parity. While Auma was one of five top July 2015 Google search terms in Kenya alongside US presidential limousine The Beast, POTUS [President of the US] and US presidential jet Air Force One ([Kariuki 2015](#)), the mainstream media hardly used the opportunity to excite debate on gender equity.

Media's lack of critical approach in the coverage of Obama's speeches and visit, especially in relation to gender, may, if not due to sour relations with gender campaigners as [Morna \(2002\)](#) may suggest, be as a result of not wanting to pander to his setting or framing of agenda, but it could also be a dislike of his haughty 'lectures' approach ([Murunga 2015](#)). However, it should not take Obama visit and speech for Kenyans to face squarely issues afflicting them, such as the gender equity "quagmire" ([Kimani 2015](#)). Kenya's mainstream and social media could focus on such critical debates and help citizens in "changing our ways and ... transform our lives for the better" instead of "complaining about imperialism and neo-colonialism" ([Murunga 2015](#)). It is worth noting that Africa has many local agents of gender and youth literacy whose fortunes and successes vary. Examples include humble, basic and grassroots approaches, for instance in South Africa.

### **Social Media Role in Enkosi Mama Capacity-building in South Africa**

The concept of media literacy is gaining ground in South Africa and several initiatives, such as the B Media Ys training programme, aim to increase awareness of how media operates. However, as in other developing parts of the world, "this dream to offer media and information literacy to all young people [of South Africa] to eliminate or at least lessen educational inequalities, and the subsequent rippling effect on the workplace and society, is still too utopian to attain on practical terms" (Saleh 2003). This is partly due gender insensitivity or



bias of mainstream media, which are still largely trusted. “Despite a growing interest in social media, traditional media has demonstrated remarkable resilience in South Africa as a trusted news source, according the 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer” (Baird and Donhauser 2014).

Ziphosakhe Hlobo’s Enkosi Mama campaign is an example of a South African educational campaign that seeks to create voices for those under-represented or misrepresented in the mainstream media. Hlobo is a poet and writer, who also develops scripts for mainstream television. The campaign, which aims to pay tribute to mothers, especially black mothers, is completely grassroots, self-funded and self-promoted using social media.

Hlobo explained that she was inspired to celebrate her own mother who died in 2004. Hlobo and a group of other artists developed a theatre production titled #EnkosiMama (“Thank you, Mother” in isiXhosa) and the campaign grew out of that. “I have a strong tie with my mom’s spirit, more and more now that I am becoming a woman. She died 11 years ago. I partnered with artists who are dealing with the same predicament, myself as producer and them as the cast and we created the work. As an emerging artist, I have also come to realise that mainstream things are being legitimised more than grassroots and alternative things, and I needed a strategy to market the theatre piece I produced called #EnkosiMama.”

Hlobo added: “I wanted to celebrate mothers who are no longer with us and those who are with us through a process of remembering/reminiscing in verse and music. The concept was beautiful and was going to hit home for every black child who was raised by a black woman. Poetry and theatre are old art forms, so I wanted to include the new age media (mommy selfie and posting it on Facebook) because I have learned that visuals speak loud and social media allows for such things to go viral. Also, the whole reason that the name of the production is a hashtag was to also incorporate the language used in social media.”

As a Media, Communication and Culture graduate, Hlobo is aware of issues around media representation and media literacy. She explained that the level of media literacy depends on the social context and standard of living of each human being in South Africa. Similar situations were observed by Saleh (2014) in other parts of Africa. Hlobo noted that one of the most popular media outlets in the townships, the settlements where much of the black majority in South Africa live, is still the community radio and word of mouth; those in richer areas are more literate in terms of new media and are able to use it where it fits.

Although she acknowledges that mainstream media sources tend to be more credible and legitimate, Hlobo believes that people are “always hungry for grassroots, new, innovative and alternative things because once it becomes mainstream, it usually neglects those in the margins and outskirts. So, in as much as mainstream media is taken to be legitimate, I think organisations do challenge the mainstream representations and I think those who win the battle

are those who strike a balance between a fair representation of people and business/ professional ethics.”

The issue of representation and misrepresentation is at the heart of Hlobo’s Enkosi Mama campaign, which aims to reclaim the power of black mothers within communities. “I’ve been concerned with the lack of representation of black mothers mostly. I think the liberal (Western) politics of feminism have really diminished the way young black people view their mothers and pushed them to non-existence for the longest of times,” Hlobo said.

Hlobo views the mainstream media in South Africa as white and patriarchal. She pointed to the fact that those women represented in South African media tend to be politically aligned or “black women in business” and so on. “There are so many black women in their houses who were housewives, left destitute by husbands who went to go work in the mines during apartheid and who had to raise children and grandchildren under the harshest and realest of conditions,” she said, citing the example of her own grandmother. “My thing is to celebrate all kinds of women, the media does not do this. Black mothers are always in relation to poverty, but how many people actually celebrate the fact that a domestic worker or a mother that sells ‘fatkoeks’ [dough bread] at the street can save money and take their child to University? If only we knew the things that a black mother’s R800 [US\$60] a month can do for her family!”

The #EnkosiMama campaign encouraged black children in South Africa, regardless of age and circumstance, to celebrate their mothers and to make those mothers visible, through, for example the “Mama Selfie”. The theatre production then cemented that celebration of black motherhood by highlighting the plights of those who had lost their mothers, but who were still influenced by them.

Hlobo points to the way things structurally are created without the inclusion of these mothers. “Why build a mall in a township and not include all the mothers who were already selling fruits on the streets? Why have programmes in the townships (or any where else for that matter) and not ask the mothers selling food to be your caterers? I love how some banks have legitimised things like ‘Stokvels’ because that’s a black mother’s epic way of saving money and it works when done right.”

The #EnkosiMama campaign used social media to reach its audience and spread the message about black mothers. Hlobo runs a movement called Radikal Xpression, which has a Facebook page, a twitter handle and blog, and she used all of these to spread the message through her network. She also created a Facebook event. Hlobo explained: “Facebook is so powerful. It helped tremendously and the show was sold out. The message to appreciate mothers has been spread.” While the reach of such a campaign is limited to the size of the network, the potential for the message to spread is significant.

Traditional means of marketing would have been costly, but Hlobo was able to communicate her message and promote her show with limited costs. “I saw that

a lot of people were interested, a lot of people e-mailed their pictures with their mothers, a lot of people came to the show because they felt like this was something worth buying into,” she said.

In a country with a diversity of cultures and languages, the need to ensure that under-represented or misrepresented groups are heard and made visible to the broader community is imperative. Campaigns like #EnkosiMama demonstrate how social media can be used to reach an audience outside of mainstream channels. Such campaigns by slightly larger voluntary organisations are making a difference in Nigeria.

### **Nigeria: Building Gender Sensitivity Capacity via Voluntary Organisations**

Projekthope is a Non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Nigeria that primarily carries out training for journalists. It operates in a Nigerian media environment that is outrageously lopsided in terms of media ownership, practice, access and use (Salawu 2006; Musa 2011). Gender lop-sidedness is, therefore, one of its major concerns. With a conspicuous social media presence Projekthope seeks to sell its ideals, which it carefully states as follows:

Journalism ethics demands that practitioners are conscious of the overriding need to be free from the shackles of biases, relying only on utmost integrity in the search for and reporting of the truth; fairly, honestly and accurately as possible. We recognise this as only possible when reporters develop positive attitudes towards inclusivity and sensitivity to minority rights issues, consistent with the media’s role of serving the public with integrity while being guided by accepted principles and standards of the profession...<sup>2</sup>

Aware of the biases inherent in the society, which are traced to the historical origin of the country’s media (Olayiwola 1991; Salawu 2006; Musa 2011), Projekthope’s principal strategy has been to employ resources available to it towards providing specialist training to journalists in Nigeria. Under the tutorship of its in-house experts, specialist fields like politics, health and education<sup>3</sup> are covered, thus arming journalists with the essential skills for reporting events in the areas. For example in the run-up to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, it organised a training programme for journalists to prepare them for pre-election, election and post-election reporting. More relevant to this discourse is the role Projekthope plays in promoting gender sensitisation in journalism training and practice in Nigeria.<sup>4</sup> This is a radical departure from the conventional practice in journalism training institutions in the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Projekthope’s Facebook page is available <https://www.facebook.com/projekthope.nigeria> (accessed 09/05/15)

<sup>3</sup>Details of the training events are available here [http://www.nigeriahive.com/inthenews/breaking\\_news\\_feeds.php?article=12](http://www.nigeriahive.com/inthenews/breaking_news_feeds.php?article=12) (accessed 07/05/15)

<sup>4</sup> Details of Projekthope’s gender sensitization training event advertisement

In response to the question whether their curricula reflect gender sensitivity or not, Dr Emman Shehu, a senior journalism lecturer at the International Institute of Journalism, Abuja, argues: “Generally, journalism institutions in Nigeria are encouraged to follow the UNESCO model. I am not aware there is emphasis on gender sensitivity, though individual institutions may have accommodated this aspect.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, he says, based on a recent agreement between the Press Council of Nigeria and the National Universities Commission (NUC) there is a plan to implement the UNESCO model, which stipulates quality education for journalists.<sup>6</sup>

Against the backdrop of the almost total lack of gender balance and/or sensitisation in journalism training in Nigeria, journalism practice is male dominated, regardless of the increasing number of female enrolment in journalism institutes (Chishala 2015). However, this does not prevent the emergence of a few but determined female practitioners who, though not necessarily feminist or influenced by a need to tilt a balance, have in their own right excelled.

Zainab Sandah runs the NGO Initiative for Community Welfare and Care,<sup>7</sup> which focuses on supporting the marginalised or society’s underrepresented including children, women and the grassroots. It seeks to influence education policy and promote equality including gender balance and the need to reduce the disparity between the more educated south and the north. Sandah explains:

Another overarching reason is the wide educational gap between the south and the north, coupled with the fact that despite being way ahead, the south is still making policies that favour quality education and providing larger access to education, while the north (minus Kano) is largely unmoved and unchanging. We are trying to make the government take responsibility by pragmatically supplying it with data and recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

Zainab Sandah extensively uses the social media and her convincing writing skills to raise awareness for her cause and raise funds to implement projects. According to her “I’d go as far as crediting the media with most of the successes we have recorded in terms of funding and implementation of projects.” And, with a combination of these tools, she is able to creditably challenge what she describes as a northern Nigerian culture that inhibits the social, political and economic growth of the female gender. She argues that challenging such culture

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Projekthope - <http://developmentdiaries.com/apply-gender-and-sexuality-training-for-nigerian-journalists/> (accessed 03/05/15)

<sup>5</sup> Dr Emman Shehu responds to a questionnaire sent 09/05/15.

<sup>6</sup>

<http://ntanews24.tv/News/Africa/2013/AUGUST/AUGUST13/Press%20Council%20Collaborates%20With%20NUC.html> (accessed 22/05/15).

<sup>7</sup> ICWC’s website is available at <http://www.icwcng.org/#> (accessed 25/05/15).

<sup>8</sup> Zainab Sandah responds to a questionnaire sent on 09/05/15.

that, for example, prevents girls from attending or finishing school, is critical for the general development and overall wellbeing of the female gender.

Among the many achievements of Zainab's NGO are: setting up a scholarship scheme under which children under the age of 18 are enrolled in primary and secondary schools and university; renovation and/or building of classrooms in public schools that have been largely neglected due to underfunding from government; provision of toilet facilities and furniture in schools; and empowering women through the provision of Computer Access Centres, where basic ICT and photography skills are taught.

Similarly, Hauwa Umar Aliyu is a female activist from northern Nigeria who says her activism is partly fuelled by her membership of the excluded nomadic Fulani group. She works mainly as a research consultant in the areas of education and public health, with a particular emphasis on the nomads and grassroots. A trained teacher who rose to the position of vice principal in a secondary school, she explains that she is actively involved in social mobilisation and community development among nomadic groups across northern Nigeria. And like Zainab and many other activists taking advantage of advanced technology, the social media effectively eases her engagement with target audience and means of sourcing resources to facilitate activities. "I have been involved in 'needs and situation assessments' for women victims of domestic violence as well as other poor and vulnerable women and children in Kano State, Nigeria."<sup>9</sup>

As a Programmes Director of the Miyetti-Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), she says she carries out awareness and sensitization campaigns aimed at promoting public health and education. She has also contributed towards facilitating and promoting maternal and child health programmes in northern Nigeria and has worked as a Local Governance Coordinator for DFID (the UK's Department for International Development) programme in Jagiwa State, northwestern Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we show the importance of gender education and show how change agents of varying profiles and leverages have sought to make a difference in the three African countries of Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria. Our approach here has been to take a look at unique or less obvious cases in countries where there already exist well-established and successful organisations that promote gender equity via media, such as [Association of Media Women in Kenya](#)

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<sup>9</sup> Hauwa Umar Aliyu responds to a questionnaire sent on 08/05/15.

[\(AMWIK\)](#) and [Gender Links](#) of South Africa. AMWIK uses media to create public awareness and also does training to build capacity of journalists and women leaders. “Gender Links ... works to promote gender equality in and through the media” ([Morna 2002](#)).

Obama’s visit to Kenya, with a focus on women and youth during the [Global Entrepreneurship Summit](#), tapped into the work already being done by a number of organisations in Africa – but not without challenges. We have shown here the challenge of Obama’s message on gender equity not being taken seriously enough to spur debate on a matter about which the country is already in a major dilemma. More needs to be done to give strong women politicians such as Martha Karua and the late Wanagari Maathai real chances of higher political positions, not because this strategy is a magic bullet but in order to help reform societal structures. On Nobel laureate Maathai [Bukenya \(2015\)](#) recalls

the persecution to which she was subjected at the time, and especially the deluge of utterly obscene, sexist and chauvinistic vilification hurled at her by the phallogocentric establishment. The entrenched patriarchy just could not stomach the fact that a “mere woman” should dare to question, let alone challenge, their “natural” right to decide on and determine the lives of everyone.

In the case of South Africa, we have shown how one change agent is single-handedly refocusing attention on the role and plight of mothers who struggle to mould members of society. Through small steps with negligible budget, the media graduate has deployed social and community media to make a difference at a very basic and local level.

In the case of Nigeria, it is pertinent to note that despite attempts to achieve gender balance in journalism training and practise, certain social and cultural practices, particularly in northern parts of the country, have been a major challenge. Nonetheless, some activists in the country are taking advantage of the uniqueness, accessibility and almost instantaneous effect of the social media as a means of mobilising resources and dissemination of messages to target audience. This is very consoling, as the case studies in this analysis clearly suggest – but more could still be done to promote gender sensitive curricula in the training of journalists in the country, which would in turn improve the quality of practice and consideration for gender sensitivity. This appears even more practicable given the agreement between the Press Council of Nigeria and the National Universities Commission (NUC) to implement the [UNESCO model](#) – update in late 2015 to include gender equity among other key areas.

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