

Defining women in media

By  Danette Breitenbach

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The benefit of equality in gender is immense. According to McKinsey, if women play the same role as men by 2025 they will add US\$28tn to the African economy. Yet for social, economic and cultural reasons, women have less than 24% voice in media and are still generally portrayed in stereotypical roles that do not reflect who they are.

For women to move beyond this, they need a place at the table and use the opportunities it provides by having a strong voice. It is important to have a voice at the table, even if yours is the lone voice, agrees Kwangu Liwewe and Andia Chakava, who were part of a panel discussing the topic: “*Redefining the voice and place of women in media today*” at the CNN Multichoice African Journalist Awards 2016 Women in Media Forum that took place in Johannesburg on the eve of the Awards.



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“As a female journalist I learnt that you have to fight for your stories,” says Liwewe, content executive at M-Net’s Zambezi Magic Channel and Talk show host of *Talk with Kwangu*. Investment professional and co-founder and MD of Alpha Africa Asset Managers, Chakava, says that representation in organisation does not mean women have a voice.

The discussion included audience participation and the debate that followed was heated at times as issues such as maternity leave and how hard working women are came up. Much discussion followed the remark made by a male member of the audience that women are not as hard working as men, and then also when another male member of the audience stated that women disappear for four months at a time to have babies.

The panel expressed its shock at these comments and was appalled at the lack of understanding of female journalists.

The perception that women can only cover soft stories also resulted in a conversation. “Who assigns the journalists – male editors - and this determines what stories journalists are given,” says Liwewe.

This perception stems from society and how women’s role in society is perceived. “It is an attitude and cultural problem that find their way into the workplace and create barriers for women. As journalists, however, you have the power to portray women differently,” says Chakava.

The definition of soft news was also challenged, as journalism is about the telling of stories. “Media is a great platform to role model women and tell their stories and so enable other women,” says Matsi Modise, MD of SiMODiSA, an industry association that accelerates entrepreneurship, and a panel member.

The panel session was in conjunction with the Graça Machel Trust’s Women in Media Network. The opening message from Graça Michel, emphasised the goal of the panel to start a conversation that will become a wave of change to reflect a new reality and tell stories in a balanced way. The Graça Machel Trust works across the continent to amplify women’s movements, influence governance, and advocate for the protection of children’s rights and dignity.

The panel was moderated by [Eleni Giokos](#), CNNMoney Africa Correspondent.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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